

No 3

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# WIDE AWAKE

A COMPLETE STORY **WEEKLY**. EVERY WEEK.

## FROM CADET TO CAPTAIN; OR, DICK DANFORD'S WEST POINT NERVE.

*By* LIEUT J. J. BARRY.



The angry cadet pushed him back over the railing. He was so furious that he meant to hurl Dick down upon the pavement, and, perhaps, kill him. The girls shrieked and rushed toward the struggling boys, blanched with horror.



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## FROM CADET TO CAPTAIN;

OR

## DICK DANFORD'S WEST POINT NERVE.

By LIEUT. J. J. BARRY.

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE CADET WHO WAS HATED.

"What are you thinking of, Juggins, old fellow?"

The question was put by one of Uncle Sam's military cadets who came upon another in the dark, down by the Siege Battery.

"Thinking of Cuba," briefly replied the cadet addressed as Juggins.

"Then your eyes are turned in the wrong direction," laughed Cadet Hope. "That's Newburg whose lights you see in the distance."

"Well, I suppose I was doing some thinking, anyway," replied Dick Danford, who, to his intimates in the Cadet Corps, was known by the nickname of Juggins.

"Which means," asked Hope, raising his brows, "that you'd rather be left alone?"

"Not a bit of it, Swogger. I'm glad you came."

"Maybe you'll be more glad, for here come some more tin soldiers," laughed Hope, glancing up the path, on which, in the darkness, were defined the figures of four more cadets coming down the slope.

"Who calls us tin soldiers?" savagely hailed Tom Stanton, one of the quartet.

"The whole country," Swogger replied, promptly and cheerfully.

"Oh, well, the country will have a different idea of us,

perhaps, before long," answered Cadet Broderick.

The four came down to the Siege Battery, joining the other two.

"Boning for the artillery, Juggins?" demanded Stanton, smiling, as he gazed at the rather tall and thoroughly athletic figure of Dick Danford, as the latter lounged against the breech of one of the great cannon.

"Artillery? No," smiled Juggins Danford. "No such luck. Too many of you fellows ahead of me in the class standing. I'll be lucky to make a doughboy regiment."

"The doughboys," it may be explained, are the infantrymen of the United States Regular Army.

Only the cadets who graduate highest in their class at West Point are appointed to the engineer or other staff departments.

Then the next highest, upon graduation, become second lieutenants in the artillery. The cadets who stand next highest are appointed lieutenants in cavalry regiments. The cadets who stand from the middle down to the bottom of the class are appointed to the infantry regiments.

"Any of us going to be dropped at the final exam, I wonder?" quizzed Hope.

"No danger this year," replied Juggins. "With war with Spain looming up, we're being graduated unusually early, and none of us are likely to miss, since we're all needed."

"I hear that that's right," nodded Broderick. "We all get through this year."

Cadets who fail seriously at any time in their four years



at West Point are dropped from the Cadet Corps and cannot "make" the army.

It is especially bitter, however, for the boy who passes all but the last examination of all, and then fails, finding his career in the army thus cut short.

But this year was an exceptional year.

No cadet was likely to be dropped, for it was 1898!

The United States battleship Maine had been blown up in Havana harbor, and nearly three hundred officers and men slain by that dastardly piece of treachery, for which the Spaniards at Havana were held responsible.

The whole country was crying vengefully for war with Spain.

The old cry, "Free Cuba!" was now all but forgotten in the new cry for blood:

"Remember the Maine!"

Yet nowhere in the United States had the frenzy reached a greater pitch than at West Point, where Uncle Sam's young cadets are trained to be officers in the army.

War with Spain—the campaign in Cuba—these were the two topics that were ever uppermost in the minds of every cadet in these stirring days of '98.

The first class was about ready to graduate.

Just as soon as graduation was over these young men would be commissioned as lieutenants, and hurried off to the regiments that were now preparing, by night and day, for the campaign that every one knew was coming.

And now these six cadets, enjoying a little respite in the fresh spring night air, talked of nothing but the coming war—the war from which some of them would not return alive.

As the six talked there in the darkness, in low tones, yet earnestly, a voice from behind them called out:

"Oh, say, fellows, we won't all see Cuba, you know. Some of us will be detailed to home duty, whether we like it or not."

The six cadets turned, rather impatiently, to stare at the newcomer, Cadet Reginald Mason.

"Oh, well, Reggy, if you want one of the nice home appointments, I will write my uncle, the Senator, about it."

There was a short, dry laugh at this. Brill's widowed mother was a washerwoman, but at West Point, where every cadet stands or falls on his own merits, and not on his parents' station in life, Brill was most heartily liked. Brill's "uncle, the Senator," was a standing joke of his own. Any cadet who had a Senator for an uncle would have had to "keep it quiet" at West Point, where no cadet ever dares brag of "big" family connections.

"Yes, Brill's uncle, the Senator, will be glad to oblige you, Mason," laughed Juggins.

But Reggy Mason flushed, furiously.

"Who wants a home appointment in war time?" he demanded, sourly.

"Well, you'll have to make up your mind soon," teased Brill. "If there's one kind of a man above another that my uncle don't like, it's the fellow who doesn't know what he wants."

There was laughter in the eyes of all the six cadets as Mason faced them.

He did not take it pleasantly, though "chaff" and "joshing" are in the air among these light-hearted cadets at West Point.

"Have your jokes and then quit," muttered Mason. "It's me for the front."

"Front of what?" queried Juggins, innocently.

Now the other cadets howled with laughter.

Mason would have resented this last question at once had he not foreseen that he would only make himself ridiculous.

As it was, though he did not speak, he glared resentfully at the harmless Juggins.

"Maybe I'm intruding," went on Mason.

"Oh, not in the least," returned Dick Danford, promptly. "In fact, Mason, you're the very one to help us solve the problem that was bothering us."

Juggins Danford spoke seriously. There was not a twinkle in the eyes of any of his comrades.

"What is the problem?" asked Mason, falling into the trap.

"Why, you see," Juggins explained, innocently, "we were discussing plans for increasing cadet interest in the Y. M. C. A. work."

At this there was another snort of laughter. Mason began to redden all over again.

"Oh," said Mason, significantly, "I was in hopes that the talk had been something about fighting."

"Well, what do you know about that subject, Mason?" Broderick demanded, in a tone that was broadly guying.

Mason flushed once more, but still felt that any betrayal of anger would play him into the hands of these teasers.

In sullen silence Mason leaned up against one of the guns.

There was silence over the group. It was as if some chilling influence had descended upon these young men.

"I'm going to stroll homeward," muttered Hope, at last, thrusting his arm through that of Dick Danford. "Come along, Jug. It's time you were in out of the night air and put to bed."

These two sauntered off up the path. Two more soon came after them, and then two more.

Cadet Mason, scowling and savage, was left alone at the Siege Battery, down by the riverside.

"What is there about Mason that always riles me, I wonder?" asked Fred Hope, thoughtfully. "Whenever I see Mason I always feel that I want to take a pot of black paint and daub it all over him. That isn't a Christian feeling I know."

"I'm sorry for Mason," Juggins replied. "It was a shame for me to guy him the way I did, and I wish I hadn't done it. Poor Mason gets rebuffs enough, anyway."

"He's the most unpopular fellow in the Cadet Corps," Hope responded. "In fact, he comes as near being hated as does any fellow here at the Point. No one likes him."



If he gets to the front in this coming war, I wonder what kind of an officer he'll make? A cold-foot?"

"Oh, don't say that!" protested Dick. "We don't turn out cowards at West Point."

"No," said Hope, thoughtfully. "They don't make either cowards or sneaks here at the Academy. But once in a while one gets through without being detected."

"Think how mean you'd feel here if you were as unpopular as Mason is," urged Dick.

"If I thought I was, I'd resign or lick the whole Cadet Corps into a decent respect for me," declared Hope.

They crossed the parade ground, then went again toward the river, halting at the edge of a high bluff that looked down upon the broad Hudson.

Brill and Broderick came along immediately after. Stanton and Ellis soon sauntered up. It was the same group that had lingered at the Siege Battery, except that Mason was left behind.

"Is Mason going to queer the service if he gets down to Cuba?" asked Stanton.

"Of course he isn't," Juggins declared, promptly. "At the worst, he's a West Point man, anyway, fellows, and will do his full duty."

"Oh, let us drop Mason!" begged Brill.

"With all my heart!" growled Stanton.

Then the talk of the six drifted back to the all-absorbing topic of the coming war with Spain.

"Oh, won't it be tough, though," sighed Stanton, aloud, "if any of us fail hard enough at the exams to be kept out of the army and Cuba?"

"It'd break my heart," admitted Dick Danford, promptly.

"Oh, it would, eh?" silently sneered a cadet, who, unseen, lurked near them in the shadow of great trees. "Then, Dick Danford, I'll break your heart if there's any way of doing it! And I believe I can find the way! Kicked out of the army—just the fate for you, Dick Danford!"

Cadet Mason's face was distorted by the meanest of passions as he darted silently along under the trees, presently to step out into plain view on the plain just beyond the parade ground.

## CHAPTER II.

### JUGGINS HAS HIS FIGHT

"Can I come in, old fellow?"

It was Mason who put the question.

He had paused just outside of the open door of the room that Danford and Hope shared, in the big, gray, old cadet barracks.

"Why, certainly," nodded Danford.

His tone was not by any means cordial, but it was meant to be polite.

It was Saturday afternoon, the day after the little gathering at the Siege Battery.

Study and recitations were through with for the week. The playtime of Saturday afternoon had come.

Hope had gone off to call on a young lady who was visiting one of the officers' families.

Danford would have liked to have been absent on a similar errand, only—well, that must be told later.

As it was, our hero was one of the few cadets who lingered in the old barracks building on this balmy afternoon.

Dick's room, being on the inside of the barracks, looked out on the quadrangle.

"If you want to bone, though, I'll get out," hinted Mason.

"No, I'm not studying," Dick replied, trying, in his kindness of heart, to be more pleasant with this unpopular fellow-cadet.

"Beastly dull in here, ain't it, for a fellow who has nothing to do?" laughed Mason, shortly, as he moved over to a seat by the window.

It was a scrupulously clean little room, though as bare as all the other cadet rooms are.

Dick tried to think of something pleasant to say, and studied the ceiling.

Suddenly, out of the corner of his eye, he saw Mason's hand flash swiftly at the open window.

Dick looked quickly around, but Mason, having turned, got lazily up from the window and walked toward the middle of the room.

From below came an ejaculation, half of disgust and half of anger.

"What's up?" queried Dick, with interest.

"Nothing," said Mason, shortly.

On the stairs was the sound of hurried steps.

Then Captain Blake, an army officer detailed to the Tactical Department, which has charge of the discipline of the cadets, strode quickly into the room.

Captain Blake was mad. Nor was the reason for that hard to understand.

Spattered over the captain's left shoulder were the remains of an egg. A part of the mess trickled down over the front of his uniform fatigue blouse.

"Some one has attempted to improve the appearance of my blouse," announced the captain, briskly. "Do either of you young gentlemen know anything about it?"

Both boys had risen and stood at the position of attention as the officer entered the room.

Now both looked full at their officer, but neither spoke.

"Danford," spoke Captain Blake, quickly, "do you know who threw that egg?"

"No-o-o, sir," Dick replied, hesitatingly.

"What do you mean, Mr. Danford, by the slowness of your answer?"

"I didn't see the egg, sir, and didn't see it thrown," Dick replied, respectfully.

"Have you any suspicion as to who threw it?"

Dick throbbed, and drew himself up a little more stiffly.

He was morally certain that Mason had been the offender, but he had not actually seen this offense against discipline committed.



"I don't know enough about it, sir," Dick replied, in a low tone, "to be able to offer any testimony on the subject."

"You didn't throw it, Mr. Danford?" demanded Captain Blake, eyeing the boy, suspiciously.

"No, sir."

"On your honor as a cadet and a gentleman?" insisted the army officer.

"On my honor as a cadet and a gentleman I did not throw the egg, sir," Dick Danford made answer.

So strict is the sense of honor among West Point cadets that this form of reply, which is seldom required, is always accepted.

With a curious look in his eyes, angry Captain Blake turned to the other cadet.

"Mr. Mason, what have you to say?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Did you see the egg thrown?"

"I prefer not to reply, sir," answered Mason, with a swift, sidelong glance at Danford.

"And why do you refuse to reply?" quivered the officer.

"Because, sir, I feel that it would be improper for me to answer."

"And why would it be improper?"

"Again, I prefer not to reply, sir."

Once more there was the slightest bit of a look in Danford's direction.

The inference was plain enough.

Cadet Mason wished it to be understood, though he would not make the charge, that our hero had thrown the egg.

"Mr. Mason, do you declare, on your honor as a cadet and a gentleman, that you did not throw the egg?"

"On my honor as a cadet and a gentleman, sir, I did not."

"Humph!"

It was most unusual for cadets to lie, yet it was plain enough to Captain Blake that one or the other of these young men was telling a falsehood.

Just in time, however, Captain Blake restrained his wrath. He remembered the coming war with Spain. He realized how badly the country would need all its West-Point-trained young officers.

"Since you both assure me, on your honor, that you did not commit this breach of discipline," said the army officer, stiffly, "I feel that I must accept your statements."

He turned upon his heel, and both cadets heard his heavy, angry step on the stairs, and the clang of his sabre.

Then, like a flash, Dick Danford turned upon the other cadet.

Dick's honest eyes flashed with a world of contempt and disdain.

For a West Point cadet hates a liar!

"Mason, you cur!" he cried, in a low but ringing voice.

"What's that?" demanded the other cadet, starting forward, his face chalk white

"You cur!"

Biff! Mason's fist shot out, but did not land. For Dick Danford had leaped lightly aside.

Swat! It was Dick's turn.

His fist landed heavily on Mason's jugular vein, sending that lying cadet in a heap to the floor.

"Hullo! What's all this?" rang Fred Hope's voice.

That cadet had stopped in the act of striding in through the doorway. Back of him, peering over his shoulders, were Cadets Brill and Stanton.

"A little disagreement," spoke Danford, quietly, though his lips were bloodless.

"It's going to be a disagreement," growled Mason, getting dazedly to his feet.

The three intruders looked on with eyes that were full of curiosity, though nothing else in their marble-like faces betrayed any excitement.

Mason turned savagely to our hero.

"Of course you'll expect to hear from this," he sneered.

"Of course," Danford agreed, bowing slightly.

"That's all!" quivered Mason.

He strode from the room, the three at the doorway moving aside to let him pass.

None of the three newly arrived cadets asked any questions, nor did Dick volunteer any information.

At West Point a cadet who is detected in a lie is "sent to purgatory."

After that none of his comrades will speak to him, except upon official business. The cadet who has been despatched to purgatory is generally made so wretchedly and miserably lonely that he is glad to resign from the military academy.

"I don't want to drive Mason from the army, just when his chance for service is coming," thought Dick, generously. "He was at fault—rottenly at fault, but if he has a chance he may come around all right after a little real, active war service."

At West Point a cadet must fight when insulted.

Such fights are quietly managed and honestly fought under the direction of a "scrap committee," each class having such a committee.

At eight o'clock in the evening strains of sweet music from an orchestra floated through McCullom Hall, where the cadet "hops" are held.

Here, of a Saturday evening, the cadets gather. Here, too, come the officers on the post, of whom there are about a hundred, and with them their wives, daughters and sisters.

Here also congregate the many young women who visit the post of a Saturday in "hop" season.

These young ladies are the guests of officers' families, or young ladies who are in other ways socially acquainted in the West Point life.

The cadet hop is always a time of joy and of social pleasure.

A cadet must not marry while he is at West Point. If he does, his marriage is treated as a resignation, and he is dropped from the army.

But it is at these hops that many love matches are formed, and after the cadet graduates and becomes an officer in the army he is at liberty to marry his sweetheart.



No law can ever be formed that will prevent a young man from having a sweetheart!

Hence, on this Saturday night many a young cadet, in full-dress uniform, was seeking out in the throng some especially bright, fair face.

Dick was there, eager and alert as any young fellow after a sweetheart.

He danced the first number with Kate, the only daughter of General Tallant.

She was as pretty a girl as had ever been seen at West Point—tall, dark-haired and black-eyed—a perfect contrast to big, blond Dick.

They were not yet sweethearts. Dick would have had it otherwise, but the girl had given no sign.

"There is one great fault with the first dance of the evening," sighed Dick.

"Yes?" Kate asked, smiling.

The witchery in her eyes set his blood on fire, but he fought down the trembling that he feared she would feel in the arm that she lightly clasped.

"The first dance is always such a short one, you know."

"I have three that are left," she replied, as she seated herself, and she looked a challenge up into his eyes.

"How many may I have?" Dick inquired, quickly.

"One!"

"Not two, at least, Miss Tallant?" he begged, desperately.

"Well, perhaps," Kate relented, smiling in a teasing way that made his blood burn hotter than before.

For now, it seemed certain, Kate was looking upon him with more favor than she had done before.

She held up her dance card, invitingly.

Then Dick had a sudden, fearful chill of realization.

One of Kate's vacant dances was for nine.

And at nine——!

He must leave McCullom Hall and go out to fight Mason.

Her second vacant dance was for 9.45.

He could hardly hope to be back that early.

The last dance vacant on her card was for 10.15.

"May I have the last open dance?" he asked, his heart feeling like ice.

"And the others?" she asked.

"I am—I'm afraid——" Dick stammered.

Kate misunderstood him.

"I am sorry," she replied, coldly, "but now I remember that that last dance is already promised."

Poor Dick. From dawning heaven he went down, swiftly, despairingly, into the depths.

"Presently I will explain—if I can," he murmured, almost brokenly.

"Why, there is nothing to explain," Kate interrupted, haughtily.

She rose as Cadet Humphrey came forward to claim her for the second dance.

Dick stood there like one in a dream—a nightmare—as Kate Tallant swept away.

"And I had just dared to hope——!" he quivered. "Now—can I ever make up that lost ground with Kate?"

Dick had no partner for the second or third dances.

There are seldom girls enough at hops to give a cadet a chance to dance every number. So all but the most popular cadets are forced to wait around through a few of the dances.

Dick might have had a partner for each dance of the evening, but he had cared only to dance with Kate, and had offended half a dozen other young ladies most seriously by forgetting to ask them.

Kate's third dance was with Mason.

Dick ground his teeth, clenching his hands tightly, when he saw that false cadet lead out on the floor the girl of his, Danford's, heart.

Then our hero turned away that he might not have the misery of seeing her waist encircled by the arm of his enemy.

The dance over, Mason led the general's daughter back to a seat close to where Cadet Danford was standing.

"Then I may have the great happiness of calling to take you for a walk to-morrow afternoon, Miss Tallant?" Mason eagerly asked.

"Yes; unless I find myself forced to change the appointment," Kate replied, lightly. "In that case, I will send you a note in the forenoon, Mr. Mason."

"Mason walk with Kate to-morrow afternoon?" flamed Dick Danford, clenching his hands harder than ever. "He won't! I'll fix that! Mason will be in no shape to appear in public to-morrow!"

"Looking for you, old fellow," whispered Hope, in our hero's ear. "It's time for us to be gliding out. But what makes you look so ghastly white, Juggins, old fellow?"

"Am I?" smiled Dick.

"You look as if you'd seen a ghost," Swogger replied, candidly. "Brace up, Juggins! That's no way to look when you're going out to—well, on our business of to-night, you know. If your nerve goes to pieces like that——"

"Don't you worry about me!" Dick Danford whispered back, fiercely. "I'm going to win that fight—simply got to!"

"Come on, then."

As the two cadets moved across the floor they heard Kate Tallant's sweet, clear laugh.

But to Dick the laughter sounded mocking.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE GENERAL'S DAUGHTER TAKES A HAND.

Here was the cadet field of honor—down in a gully, close to the river, under the ancient mounds of old Battery Knox.

Dick Danford and Cadet Mason were there, stripped to the waist, each showing a magnificent rib-cage, chest and back muscles that swelled grandly, neck muscles that stood out, thick, powerful biceps and heavy forearms.

They were two of the best men, physically, in the first class.



Dick had been in four fights before, only one of which he had won.

Mason had had six fights, with a winning record of four.

In the fistic arena Cadet Mason was a nasty opponent. He was a skillful boxer, a swift and hard hitter, and a trickster.

But Dick felt equal to him on this night!

"I'll thrash daylight through him, if for no other fault than daring to ask Kate for a walk!" Dick quivered.

Each man had two seconds, Hope and Brill acting for our hero.

Each had a bottle-holder, Stanton performing that service for Danford.

Cadet Pierce was referee. Betts was timekeeper.

Outside of these immediately interested cadets none others were present.

The affair had been quietly managed. Too many cadets absent from McCullom Hall would have attracted suspicion.

For, though the cadet fight must be fought when need arises, yet cadets detected in fighting are liable to dismissal from the military academy.

The spot was a favorite, well-selected one for affairs of honor.

"Ready!" cried Referee Pierce, in a low tone.

The two cadets faced each other, glaring deadly hatred.

"Time!"

Mason shifted on his feet, hanging low and watching for a chance at our hero's wind.

Dick did not venture. He waited for Mason's first move.

It was our hero's plan to wait for Mason to start the mill, to counter and then to jump in, forcing the aggressive.

For Dick Danford, his blood up, prayed for a knockout victory in the first round.

It soon became plain, though, that Mason did not propose to force the fighting too far.

He ducked in at last, however, swung rather clumsily, and left his head in peril.

Dick struck out, trying for his knockout. It failed to register, but Mason, stretching up, closed in with a dazer on Danford's jaw.

It loosened a tooth, Dick knew that, for he felt the blood in his mouth.

A low, panting laugh came from Mason as he ducked back, getting on a firm, safe defensive.

Dick was blazing with anger and the humiliation of having gotten the first hard tap.

He felt like rushing forcefully in—which Mason wanted him to do.

"Cool, old fellow," muttered Dick. "Don't let that snake upset your nerve."

Now they came together again, sparring cautiously, each trying to save his wind with footwork and caution.

Then Mason led out, but Dick parried, followed up, was met, dodged back, returned, almost clinched, got away a bit, and—

Swat! Dick felt better now, for he had landed a bruiser on Mason's left ear.

It was not a "knocker," though, for Mason was down low again, once more. Just as Danford had his wind safely guarded, Mason leaped up.

Danford met him there, too, and now again they sparred for opening.

Swiftly, like a flash, Mason dropped low, then came up under.

Whoof! It landed just below the belt on Dick. He felt his wind going up in a puff.

Mason tried to follow, but Danford was going down. He fell, too weak, for the moment, to rise.

"One, two, three, four, five, six——" came the count.

Dick tried desperately to rise, while Mason stood, gloatingly, over him.

"Time!" was the welcome sound.

Dick Danford was saved, for the time being.

Cadets, Hope Brill and Stanton went furiously at work on him, while Mason's trainers worked more indolently in the other corner.

"Don't lose your nerve, old man," whispered Hope, anxiously.

"Don't you worry!" flashed Dick, with the first of his returning breath.

"And don't get rattled."

"Not on——"

"Hush, Juggins!" ordered Swogger Hope, sternly. "Save all your breath for Mason."

Despite his jolt, Dick Danford, thanks to his nerve, was in fair shape by the time that the men were called together again.

Mason danced around him this time, with plenty of light, fancy footwork. He was plainly trying to rattle his opponent, whom he now regarded as a certain and easy victim.

But Dick was wary now. He was lying low for his chance.

In the first half of the round each registered two or three punches that did no particular harm.

Then Mason closed in for heavy work.

He hammered right and left, but scientifically, pushing off Danford and trying to get in his own touches.

It was close, clever work on both sides.

Just at the finish, Mason let out with his left for Dick's jaw.

It almost landed. Had it done so it would have been a knockout.

But Dick went down, the fist passing through the air over his shoulder.

Up and back he came, with an uppercut that made Mason bite his tongue.

Now the two put up their guards strongly, each watching for his own chance.

"Time!"

Though they dropped their hands to their sides, Danford and Mason, for some seconds, stood leering, with hate, into each other's faces.

Then back to their seconds and bottle-holders they went.



Our hero was panting hard, for his enemy was a mean one at forcing a mill.

"You did better, though you're winded a goodish bit," whispered Cadet Hope. "Don't be in a hurry, though. Play patient. You can't beat that fellow in a rush, but I believe you could wear him out in ten rounds more."

Ten rounds? To Dick's feverish impatience "ten years" would have been as welcome advice.

At the call, both men were in the center again.

This time each had his jaw firmly set. The onlookers knew that some real fighting was to be looked for.

While they sparred away a skirt swished on the slope above, though none at the ringside heard or knew.

Kate Tallant had changed her mind by a sudden whim.

Excusing herself to three disappointed, crestfallen cadets, she had cancelled that number of dance engagements.

Immediately after, feeling a whim for the open air, Kate had begged Major Daggart to escort her.

The major, a somewhat near-sighted, splendid old fellow, whose office was to assist in teaching the cadets mathematics, had quickly obliged.

Outside of McCullom Hall, Kate Tallant had developed a desire for a brisk walk.

The major kept gallantly at her side, chatting with her for some moments.

Before they reached Battery Knox, however, Kate's supply of small talk had run out.

She and the major relapsed into silence, walking more slowly.

"Shall we go down into the glen?" murmured Kate. "It's a charming spot."

"Wherever you wish, my dear Miss Tallant," Major Daggart replied, in a tone as low.

Thump! thump! swat!

"Good!" sounded a second's low voice.

What could this mean?

Both strollers started—Kate with puzzled curiosity, the good old major with well-founded suspicion.

"Why, bless me!" murmured Major Daggart, not more than half aloud.

His instinct and his knowledge of West Point customs made him instantly aware of what must be going on below.

As one of the officers of the academy, it was his duty to stop the fight at once, to take the names of the cadets present and to order them to their quarters in cadet barracks.

Major Daggart was a stickler for duty.

In nearly forty years of service he had never shirked duty.

He did not mean to do it now.

Yet he hated, with all his military old soul, to spoil a fight. He loathed the notion of getting cadets into trouble just for a fight.

But there were the regulations, and here was his duty.

Fumbling nervously at his sword belt, Major Daggart made up his mind to rush down the slope and do the disagreeable thing.

More sounds had come to Kate Tallant's ears. She, too, knew and understood.

She loved the cadets—loved them all in an impartial way, as an Army girl should.

So Kate Tallant did what no cadet could do and keep his self-respect.

She lied!

"Oh, Major!" she cried, with a funny little catch in her voice, as she clutched at Daggart's arm and looked with sweet appeal into his eyes.

"Er—er—what is it, my dear?" faltered the old officer. "You're startled?"

"And with good reason," trembled Kate.

"Yes, yes, I know," quavered the major.

His mind was on the fight. So was Kate's, though in a different way.

"I'm scared to death, Major Daggart!" Kate went on, tremulously, trying desperately to fix her companion's mind on anything but the tell-tale sounds of "scrap" from below. "My opal pin—the one that descended from my great-grandmother——"

"Eh? Opal pin—your grandmother——" faltered Major Daggart, trying hard to fix his mind on this queer talk.

"It was pinned to a lace handkerchief, Major!" Kate wound up, nervously. "I dropped it between the hall and here. It will spoil all the pleasure of years if I lose that precious heirloom!"

"Quite so—quite right," agreed the major. "We'll go back and look for it at once!"

"No, no!" Kate ordered, imperiously. "You must go back alone, Major. Search our path thoroughly. I'll search around here. Go! Hurry!"

Major Daggart turned and sped back along the path, inwardly blessing the girl's quick wit.

And Kate, having lied without deceiving any one, left by herself now, began to tremble.

For it was surely enough a fight below, and a savage one. Kate, with her woman's instinct, did not like fisticuffs.

Biff! It was a fearful blow, followed by the sound of a falling body. Kate stuffed her ears with her fingers, though not quite enough to shut out all sound.

She recognized Cadet Pierce's low voice, which announced:

"Danford wins with a knockout at the end of third round."

"Mason's pretty badly hurt," came back another voice.

Danford? Mason? Both cadets had been very agreeable to her. Kate felt thankful that she had saved them from serious trouble.

She hurried back over the road, found the major searching faithfully, even if not hopefully, and caught his arm.

"Please take me back to the hall," she begged.

Not so many minutes after Cadet Pierce strolled into the hall, looking as innocent as a lamb.

Kate found a chance to signal him.

"Was Mr. Mason much hurt?" she whispered, when the late referee stood before her.

Cadet Pierce shot a swift look into her eyes, but Kate met the look, unflinchingly.



"I want to know," she insisted.

"Yes," was Pierce's grim answer.

"Was his face badly marked?"

Again Pierce regarded the girl curiously before he replied:

"I'm afraid, Miss Tallant, that one of Mason's eyes is closed about tight. He lost a tooth, and has some bruises on his face."

"Shocking!" shuddered Kate. "And thank you!"

Cadet Pierce realized his dismissal. He strolled away, wondering.

Dick Danford came in a few minutes later. Outwardly, he showed not a mark on his handsome, soldierly young face.

The music had started another dance. There was Kate, not dancing.

Flushed with his late triumph, urged by desperation, Dick resolved to risk all on a single throw of the dice of love.

"May I?" he whispered, as he pressed through the little throng of cadets around the girl.

Kate smiled slightly, allowed him to whirl her away, and Cadet Danford was half puzzled but almost wholly delighted.

"I wish I might dare to hope for a walk with you tomorrow afternoon," he whispered in her pink little ear as they moved through the waltz.

"Are your hopes often realized?" she teased back.

"May I call for you?" trembled Dick.

"Why not?" she challenged.

"I shall call, then, at half-past one," Dick Danford declared, boldly.

"And if I am not ready?" she asked.

"But you will be!"

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE GRIT OF THE BORN TROOPER.

"By column of twos!" pealed the bugle at the rear of the little cadet troop.

From column of fours the troop lengthened out into the thinner line as the troop swung around onto a cliff-side road, away upon one of the big hills at the rear of the West Point reservation.

Half of the first class was out for cavalry troop drill.

At the head of the line rode Mason, troop leader for this march in saddle.

Just back of him, on another horse, was Dick Danford, acting as cadet first sergeant.

At the rear of the entire line rode Captain Simmons, one of the army cavalry instructors, and behind Simmons was a bugler from the regular army cavalry.

The troop was out for practice in rough marching, over hill roads well suited to the purpose.

Now the troop had swung onto a rough, rock-strewn road out into the side of the cliff.

Further on the road was narrower and rougher still, with a sheer, dangerous precipice at the left-hand side.

"Trot!" ordered the bugle.

It was a rough and dangerous place for moving horses fast, but Uncle Sam's military cadets get much rough and hard work while they are training to become soldiers.

Now the road narrowed down much more, and here the cliff's precipice seemed all but under the horses' very feet.

"By single file, march!"

As that command pealed out from the bugle at the rear, the line once more lengthened.

Mason led at an interval of several yards.

Then came Dick Danford, actually leading the little troop.

The trot had become a rapid one.

Cadet Mason, always nervous at great heights, looked down the precipice at his left hand and shivered.

Dick Danford gave no thought of the danger of the ride. He trusted all to his horse.

"Careful!" Mason shouted back.

"Careful!" Danford repeated. He was in duty bound to pass the order that came from the troop leader, but our hero smiled rather scornfully.

"Whoa—you brute!" roared Mason, suddenly.

There was a note of terror in his voice, then a shriek of something very like fright as his horse bolted ahead at full gallop.

Dick saw, and watched with amazement, wondering why Mason did not rein up the steed, which had been frightened by something.

But Mason's runaway horse bolted on, unchecked.

Then Dick saw Mason's head strike, glancingly, against a jagged bit of rock that overhung from the cliff at the right hand.

"Great scott! He's knocked out!" quivered Dick, as he saw Mason reel in his saddle.

Dick's spurs sank deep into the flanks of his own mount.

Away our hero dashed, leaving the little gray troop behind, for now the troop sergeant was bent on a work of rescue.

Mason, struck on the head and unsteady in the saddle of a runaway brute, was in fearful peril on that narrow, treacherous cliff road above a precipice.

Nor was Dick Danford in any less peril, as his horse, startled by the unexpected dig of spur, bounded wildly ahead.

"Pull up, Mr. Mason!" Dick bellowed. "Rein in—hard!"

But either Mason did not hear or he was too dazed by his blow on the head to comprehend.

Certainly, his runaway brute did not slacken.

Loosened bits of stone flew from under its hoofs and went clattering down the precipice.

"Gracious!" gasped Dick, as he saw Mason's horse slip and all but go shooting headlong over the precipice.



But Mason did not seem to pull up; it was the horse, not the rider, that prevented disaster.

"Pull hard to the right!" Dick shouted, as he dug his spurs deeper in. "Keep to the right—away from the precipice side. I want the precipice side to pass you on!"

Danford ground his teeth together, pressed his lips grimly as he found himself getting closer to the sweating flanks of Mason's horse.

"Mr. Mason, pull up and rein in to the right!" our hero implored once more.

But still the runaway horse ahead appeared to be without control.

Mason swayed in his army saddle as if he would fall out at a breath.

Now Dick, his face white and set, took a deep breath as he spurred forward for the last, desperate act.

He was staking his life, though doing it with the carelessness of the soldier.

"Try hard to understand me, Mr. Mason!" he shouted. "Rein up hard and pull over to your right. I'm going to pass you! Quick, now!"

No sign from the nerveless rider on the runaway ahead.

With a final prayer that did not form in mere words, Dick dashed forward.

He was up with Mason's beast, ready to pass—to the left, on the precipice side.

And now Dick made the desperate effort, guiding his horse by on the outside of a road that was wide enough but for one.

The horses were passing.

Dick Danford was leaning far to the right, ready to seize at the bridle of Mason's mount—when he felt the whole earth slipping away from under him.

He knew what it meant.

His own horse, with next to nothing of footing on that narrow, granite shelf, had slipped—was sliding over the precipice.

There was hardly time to think.

Dick acted, instead—acted desperately, but bravely.

Leap! It was an old West Point trick in its best form.

As the horse's body shot over the edge of the precipice, Cadet Danford's body rose in a sublimely magnificent leap.

He got one leg over the back of Mason's mount, caught at Mason's swaying body and the back of the saddle, and pulled himself erect.

"Poor, noble old brute!" shuddered Danford, as he heard, behind, the sound of his own horse clattering down the steep, rocky side of the precipice.

But he threw his arms around Mason, clutched at the bridle and slowly but surely brought the trembling animal down to a walk.

Behind, the clattering troop came up, with a noisy, musical jingling of hanging sabres.

"Walk!" sounded the short, sharp bugle command, as the gray troop behind got close.

The cadets riding behind, stern, grim soldiers all of them, glanced ahead.

Wildly they longed to cheer, but discipline forbade.

"Are you dazed, Mr. Mason?" Dick asked.

Only a grunt answered him from the trembling figure in the saddle before him.

Soon the cliff road ended.

Dick rode out onto a broad table-land, reined up at the side and halted.

"Can you slip down to the ground, Mr. Mason?" he asked, as he himself alighted.

Mason tried to dismount, but needed Danford's arm to save him from pitching headlong.

"Crawl over there and rest," Dick advised, and Mason obeyed as one in a trance.

Now the foremost troop riders were up with him, as Danford stood holding Mason's horse by the bridle.

One after another the cadets of the little gray troop passed.

Each, in turn, looked at our hero out of the corner of his eye.

There was a world of silent, soldierly approval in those half-glances.

Dick understood easily enough.

"Humph! The fellows are making too much of a bit of simple cavalry work," he grunted to himself.

And here, at the very rear of the troop, rode Captain Simmons and the bugler.

"Halt!" rang the single, sharp tone from the bugle.

As Captain Simmons turned and rode to the left, Dick, standing at the bridle of Cadet Mason's horse, saluted with true soldierly precision.

"Sir," he called, "I have to report that I found it necessary to leave the ranks. I have also to report, sir, with regret, that I have lost my horse."

"I think, Mr. Danford," replied Captain Simmons, drily, though he smiled warmly, "I think that we can dispense with further report for the present. I shall make a full report myself of the splendid work that I saw you do. I will only say now, Mr. Danford, that you have displayed, in its best form, the grit of the born trooper!"

Dick saluted again, with a gesture that was eloquent in itself.

Captain Simmons dismounted, walked over to where Mason lay, and examined him.

"See here, Mr. Mason," whispered the cavalry officer, in a voice so low that none of the other cadets heard, "see here, you're not hurt. For heaven's sake, man, don't let your comrades see that your nerve has left you! Be a man! Brace!"

The sharp, official contempt roused the badly shattered cadet.

Within five minutes Mason was again in condition to mount and lead the troop over the now safe road, back to the cavalry plain.

Dick walked, grieving over the really fine horse that his heroism had lost to the service.

At the cavalry plain enlisted cavalymen of the regular army took over the horses, leading them to stable:

But as for the cadets, the instant they were dismissed, and the strict restraints of discipline were past, they



crowded about young Danford, patting him on the shoulder or wringing his hand.

They didn't say much, for like true soldiers few words were needed.

Cadet Mason found himself walking alone, unnoticed, on the way back to barracks.

"Oh, of course!" growled the disgusted one. "It's all Danford. It's enough to make one sick. He didn't need to rescue me. I had my nerve with me. But it gave the cad a chance to be picturesque. And now Danford will get named in special orders. Every one, from the superintendent down, will pat him on the back in one way or another. Danford! I hate the name!"

In his intensity, Cadet Mason was talking almost aloud.

His face wore a scowl, his lips twitched nervously.

"But you shan't get into the service, Dick Danford!" choked the enraged cadet. "I swear you shan't. I'll stop you from getting into a regiment, if—if——"

The words were hissed between Mason's bloodless lips:

"If I have to take a pistol and shoot you in the back!"

## CHAPTER V.

### CAUGHT RED-HANDED AT "CRIBBING"?

"Twenty minutes to swear?"

That was the joking remark of a first class cadet, as the members of the cadet corps came out from cadet mess at 7.40 that morning.

The long, dreary, soul-racking week of annual examinations was nearly at an end.

It was Saturday morning.

Final examinations in history would take up the forenoon.

In the afternoon came the questions in astronomy.

Then the fearful yearly ordeal would be over.

Many of the cadets in the four different classes knew already that they had failed to pass in one or another of the examinations.

Those who had failed sufficiently would be dropped from the rolls—sent back to private life from West Point. Those who had failed but slightly might be given another chance.

So far the failures in the first class—the men who hoped to graduate and to get into the coming war with Spain—had not in any case been serious.

Every first class man still hoped to get through the ordeal successfully, especially as it was well known that the army stood in need of officers.

"I feel safe now," muttered Fred Hope, as he and Danford strolled slowly, arm-in-arm. "History and astronomy are easy for me."

"Oh, astronomy is all right for me!" smiled Dick.

"That's so. I forgot that history is your hard point. But cheer up, old fellow. You can't fail to get through—somehow."

"I'm not nervous," Dick replied.

"Well, when you're not nervous, the battle is half won. But, I say, Juggins, somehow you seem down in the mouth about something, just the same."

"Do I?" Dick asked, with a start.

"You sure do."

Dick compressed his lips tightly, closing his teeth close together.

The iron was pressing into his soul, but he had not meant to show it.

On the afternoon before he had met Kate Tallant, with her father, General Tallant.

The latter had come to West Point as a member of the Board of Visitors, a board that always comes to West Point at graduation time.

Dick had made his best salute to the general, who had returned the salute.

But Kate, from whom our hero had looked for a friendly nod, had bowed slightly and coolly.

What could it have meant?

Worse still, that evening, while wandering along the road between the parade-ground and the cavalry plain, he had come upon her in the company of Cadet Mason.

Now, as Dick remembered the happenings of the day before, he felt glum indeed.

If he could, he would have warned Kate as to the kind of fellow Mason was.

But West Point cadets do not carry tales. The one who does is sure to wish he had never seen the United States Military Academy.

"Has Mason been lying to her about me?" our hero wondered, as he walked this Saturday morning with his chum. "Yes, he must have, for I haven't done anything that could possibly offend Kate. It is he who has lied, if any one has, for Mason is the only fellow here at the Point who would be guilty of lying. Oh, if I could only find out!"

Yet how?

Dick Danford could not go to Kate Tallant and ask her bluntly if Cadet Mason had been lying about him.

That would be contrary to the code of honor among the cadets, where no cadet is supposed to lie—where every young man is on his honor to speak the truth and to be a gentleman at all times.

For our hero to go to Kate and ask her, simple as it seemed, whether Mason had been lying about him, would be to expose Danford to the censure both of his fellow-cadets and of the military authorities of the academy.

Now sounded the bugle that drove the cadets to their rooms in barracks.

A very few minutes later they marched out again in squads, each going in brisk military step to the room assigned for the examination of that squad.

Dick's section marched into one of the rooms belonging to the department of history.

At the word of command the cadets seated themselves at their desks, where, already, were writing-paper, pens and ink.



And now the examination papers, containing the questions, were passed out.

In thoughtful silence Dick Danford began to scan the questions.

"Whew!" he muttered, uneasily. "It's a hard lot this year. But I guess I can get through the questions with a high enough mark. I've got to, anyway!"

Picking up his pen, he began to write his answer to the first question.

Having finished it, he read it through.

"I wonder if that answer is anything like straight?" sighed poor Dick. "Oh, dear! I wish I had the fellow here who invented history!"

Beyond any doubt this exam was a "sweater."

Almost in dumb despair, Dick reached into the only pocket in his gray uniform blouse.

This pocket was inside the blouse.

Dick's fingers closed on the handkerchief.

He drew it out, and then his fingers closed upon a paper folded in the handkerchief.

"Eh? What's this?" muttered Danford, holding the paper low behind his desk.

In wonder he unfolded the sheet.

"Mr. Danford!"

The low, stern voice was that of Captain Rogers, the examiner in history.

"Mr. Danford, what is that you have in your hand?"

"A piece of paper, sir," Dick answered, rising and standing at attention.

In an instant the attention of every man in the room was centered on this one cadet and the stern-looking army officer, who stood before the boy.

"What is on that paper, Mr. Danford?" rang the stern voice of the army officer.

"I don't know, sir."

"Don't know?"—unbelievably.

"I have just found the paper, sir."

"Just found it? Where, Mr. Danford?"

"Folded in my handkerchief, sir."

"Hm! Let me have the paper."

Flushing, trembling, as the innocent often do when under accusing suspicion, Dick passed the sheet to his superior officer.

Captain Rogers unfolded the document, looked it rapidly over, then asked:

"Mr. Danford, you assure me you did not know that this sheet contains the answers to a great many questions in history?"

"I assure you, sir," Dick cried, white to the roots of his hair, "that I never saw the paper until just now."

"You assure me that you did not prepare this paper and save it for use?"

"I did not, sir!" Dick cried, his voice thrilling with indignation.

"Then, who did?"

"I don't know, sir," Dick protested. "I know nothing at all about it. Am I privileged to ask, sir, in whose handwriting the paper seems to be?"

"These answers were written on a typewriter," returned Captain Rogers, in a voice full of meaning.

Dick stood there, still at attention, as white as marble, and as rigid.

He felt as if the whole world were falling out from under him.

In a second the whole awful meaning of this scene had flashed upon him.

The "cribber"—he who sneaks a book, or a paper full of answers into an examination room—is always despised by all honest students.

Here he was, accused of just such an act—accused just as much as if Captain Rogers had put the accusation into direct words.

If he could not clear himself, Dick Danford saw the whole of his life slipping away from him.

He would not be allowed to graduate—would never become an officer in the army.

There would be no military future for him—no campaign against the Spaniards in Cuba.

Life could hold nothing for him but disgrace, dishonor.

Yet Dick Danford did not choke up. He did not play the baby.

His West Point nerve came right to the surface.

The room was as still as the tomb.

Captain Rogers was thinking. The cadets looked on, hardly daring to breathe.

In that awful silence Dick did not attempt to speak.

He had no right to open his mouth unless questioned.

But now Captain Rogers spoke, his words sounding, in that stifling room, like the death sentence from a judge:

"Mr. Danford, you are excused from further examination. You will remain at your desk until you receive further orders."

Dick sat down—not all in a heap, but as became a soldier under fire.

"Mr. Hope, you will go to the nearest telephone and ask Lieutenant Dean, with my compliments, to report here at once."

Hope went out, came back, and the cadets slowly got back to their writing.

Dick, as he sat there, did not attempt to look around. He did not seek the eyes of his astounded comrades, but stared straight at the nearest wall.

Lieutenant Dean came in, saluted, and then he and his superior officer talked almost in whispers.

"Mr. Danford," sounded the captain's voice, "you will accompany Lieutenant Dean. Consider yourself under arrest, unless you are released from it."

Rising, saluting, Dick turned and followed the lieutenant from the room.

"Get your cap," commanded the lieutenant, when they were outside.

Out into the open they walked, neither the lieutenant nor the crushed cadet saying a word.

As our hero had expected, Mr. Dean walked straight to the headquarters building.



Passing inside, and going upstairs, they stepped into an ante-room of the superintendent's office.

"Wait here, Mr. Danford," commanded Lieutenant Dean, crisply, as he went on inside.

Left to himself, Dick felt like shrieking out in his despair.

"It's all up with me, I guess," he muttered, dismally, to himself. "I can't disprove this charge. Who could have put that paper there? Mason? It doesn't seem as if he could do such a thing! Yet he is the only enemy I have, and the only fellow at West Point who could be fairly suspected of anything dishonorable. Yes, yes! It must have been Mason.

He was in the room, too, after breakfast, while my blouse was hanging up and I was washing my hands. Oh, Mason! Mason! How could you do such a dirty, dishonest trick?"

Dick's eyes flashed. His hands gripped tighter as he groaned, inwardly:

"If this is Mason's work, I believe I could kill him for it! It would hardly seem like murder! To kill my whole, dearly loved army career like this—and just as war is coming on! To send me out into the world, dishonored! But I mustn't think. My head's going wild, and——"

"Follow me, Mr. Danford!"

It was the cold, unsympathetic voice of the lieutenant, returning.

Like one in a dream, yet losing not a particle of his soldierly bearing, Danford followed into the superintendent's office.

There's behind his official desk, sat Colonel Graham.

Dean, having conducted the accused cadet into the room, retired to a far corner of the office.

Cadet Dick Danford marched grimly to a position before the superintendent's desk, saluted, then stood rigidly at attention.

"Mr. Danford, this is a very serious charge," declared the superintendent, gravely. "I presume I do not need to repeat the charge."

"It is not necessary, sir," Dick replied, in a hard, dry voice.

"Do you confess to guilt?"

"I do not, sir."

"But the evidence—this slip containing the answers?"

"I did not know that it was in my pocket, sir."

"But how could it have come there if you did not put it there?"

## CHAPTER VI.

### UNDER FIRE FOR HIS HONOR!

"I don't know how it got there, sir!"

Dick Danford's voice ran with the evidence of honesty.

Yet officials cannot decide guilt or innocence on the voice or the manner of the accused.

Dick Danford, though, was at bay.

His whole future depended on the developments of this day.

More than that—his mother!

The thought of that gentle, sweet-faced old woman, living in the little country home out in Illinois, choked him, yet nerved him on to a desperate fight.

Then there was Kate Tallant!

Whether or not he could win her, he would sooner die than think that she would believe him guilty of such dishonest trickery as "cribbing" for an examination.

"Mr. Danford," asked the superintendent, searchingly, "do you assure me, on your honor as a cadet and a gentleman, that you have no guilty knowledge of this condemning paper?"

"I do assure, you, sir, on my honor as a cadet and a gentleman!"

The colonel's voice softened a trifle, his face became milder in its look, as he replied:

"That assurance, Mr. Danford, must count towards a belief in your asserted innocence. Yet, in a matter like this I must be sure that I get at the truth. You may be seated."

Dick dropped, stiffly, into the chair beside the superintendent's desk.

"Mr. Dean, will you leave us alone for a little while?" called Colonel Graham.

After Dean had left the office the superintendent went on:

"As it is quite possible, Mr. Danford, that you are innocent of guilt in this fearful thing, I will give you every opportunity to help me in solving the puzzle. Either you placed this accusing paper in your own pocket, or some one else did. Do you suspect any one else?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who?"

"I prefer not to answer, sir."

"Why?"

"Because I have not a particle of proof against the person whom I may suspect."

"And you feel that to name another suspected person would be too monstrous where you have no proof?"

"That is my feeling exactly, sir."

"You are right, Mr. Danford. But you must answer some questions for me."

"Very good, sir."

"You know just whom you suspect?"

"I do, sir."

"Is the suspected person a cadet?"

"Must I answer that, sir?"

"Yes."

"The person I suspect is a cadet," Dick answered, reluctantly.

"But you do not wish to name him?"

"It does not seem to me, sir, that it would be just."

"Then, Mr. Danford, how am I to investigate? How am I to have any chance to find out that you are as innocent as you claim to be? Do not hurry with your answer. Take time to think it over, Mr. Danford. In a



matter that affects your whole future career I do not wish to hurry you to your disadvantage."

"May I have that paper to examine, sir?" Dick asked.

Colonel Graham passed the sheet to him.

Dick studied the typewriting. The type was badly worn, the color of the ribbon blue.

Then our hero looked at the paper itself.

He turned it over at last.

On the reverse side, near the top, were written the letters, "D-e-a," as if some one had started to write the word "dear," and then had tossed the sheet aside.

Colonel Graham watched the young cadet attentively as our hero carefully scanned this scant bit of penmanship.

Not for five minutes did our hero speak.

During that time he was fighting a harder, keener battle within himself than could possibly come to the lot of a soldier in a campaign.

"There are some things here, sir, that I would call your attention to, sir," spoke the cadet, at last.

"I am listening," replied Colonel Graham.

"In the first place, sir, I believe this typewriting to have been done on the machine in the cadet Y. M. C. A. rooms, where, I believe, is the only typewriter on the post that has a blue ribbon."

"Very good," nodded the superintendent.

"This paper, sir, probably came from some cadet's stock of note-paper, for, you see, some one has started to write on the back of the sheet."

"I had not noticed that yet, Mr. Danford," cried the superintendent, taking the sheet and scanning it curiously. "But you are right."

"I will ask, sir, if you think it would be possible to identify those three letters as being in the handwriting of any particular cadet?"

"Why, I think that may be possible, Mr. Danford. But you could assist me much in that respect."

Dick glanced inquiringly at the superintendent.

"By naming the cadet whom you suspect of having been at the bottom of this affair."

Dick colored.

"I ask to be excused, sir, from answering that question."

"Even in order to shield yourself."

"No inducement, sir, could make me, willingly, answer that question."

"Why, Mr. Danford?"

"Because I share the general hatred here, sir, for a tale-bearer."

"Would that be tale-bearing in a case like this, Mr. Danford?"

"It would seem so to me, sir."

"Then it will be much more difficult, Mr. Danford, for me to succeed in clearing you of a charge of which you may be innocent."

Our hero bowed, without speaking.

"If you have anything else that you wish to say, Mr. Danford, I will listen."

"May I ask the privilege, sir, of asking you a few questions?"

"If they are proper ones, Mr. Danford, I will answer them," the superintendent quickly replied.

"What, sir, has been my record here as to conduct?"

"Excellent," Colonel Graham replied, without hesitation.

"My reputation as to honesty and honor, sir?"

"I have never heard a breath against your reputation in that respect, Mr. Danford."

"Is there anything, sir, in my whole record at West Point that could justify the suspicion that I am guilty of this present charge?"

"Nothing whatever, Mr. Danford!"

The answer came promptly and with vigor from the superintendent.

But he added, a second later:

"Nothing, that is, except the proof now before me."

"And you admit, sir, that that is not conclusive proof?"

"I do, Mr. Danford. And I further state that your silence on one point tends to keep me from getting at the real truth in case you are really innocent."

Dick was deathly pale, but he remained silent.

"Anything else, Mr. Danford?"

"Yes, sir," the boy replied, with effort, but looking yearningly at his superior officer. "I have a very urgent request to make, sir. I am at present under arrest, and naturally cannot take the two examination remaining. As every man is held to be innocent until he has been proved guilty, I ask you, sir, if you will release me from arrest and allow me to take the two examination to-day?"

"That would be rather unusual, Mr. Danford. Have you a good reason to urge for such a request?"

"If I am innocent, sir," Dick urged, wistfully, "then it would be hard, indeed, to be kept from these examinations, just before graduation. If it is decided, in the end, that I am guilty, then my having taken the examinations and passed in them will not save me from dismissal from the academy and from the army. In support of my request, sir, I urge the consideration of all my past record at West Point."

Colonel Graham leaned back in his chair, thinking deeply for some moments.

"Mr. Danford," he answered, at last, "these are very unusual days at West Point. Moreover, there is much in what you urge as to your past excellent record here. I release you from arrest, therefore. You will take the remaining examinations. But I warn you that, unless investigation brings out facts that clear you of this charge, then you will undoubtedly be held to be guilty."

"Thank you, sir."

"The matter rests here, then, Mr. Danford, until the examinations are over."

"Thank you, sir."

Lieutenant Dean was called in and the situation explained to him.

"You will repeat this decision before the section to which Mr. Danford belongs, Mr. Dean," directed the superintendent.

Again the army lieutenant and the army cadet walked between headquarters and the examination room.



Just before they entered the latter building, Lieutenant Dean said, very quietly:

"I am very glad over the outcome so far, Mr. Danford. I trust, sincerely, that you will be able to clear yourself of the charge."

"I thank you, sir."

It was cheering to distracted Dick to know that he had even this much sympathy from another.

Before Dick's section, Lieutenant Dean announced that Danford had been released from arrest pending a further investigation.

While the announcement was being made our hero stood facing the cadet members of the section.

He caught the gaze of Mason, and held it for a second.

Then Mason lowered his eyes and changed color.

In that second Dick Danford knew his man—his enemy!

"It was Mason!" he quivered, and hated his enemy utterly.

Yet Dick Danford, as he returned to his desk, did not regret that he had refused to name Mason.

West Point honor, West Point traditions forbade him to carry tales even against a triumphant enemy.

Dick Danford had enough West Point nerve to suffer rather than to break the cadet rules of honor and manly conduct.

He succeeded, at last, in fastening his mind again on the examination questions before him.

Examination over, the section marched back to barracks.

Not a word did Dick speak until he and Fred Hope found themselves in their room.

"The whelp!" broke tempestuously from Hope's lips.

Both knew to whom that term of contempt referred.

"It's the meanest put-up job I ever heard of," Hope raged. "But I will help avenge you, Juggins. I'll find an excuse—or make one—for calling the whelp out to a fight. I'll polish him off, if I lose my commission in the army for it!"

"Don't," begged Dick, quietly.

"Eh? What?"

"Leave him alone."

"Not thump him—the whelp?" demanded Swogger, in amazement. "Why, I can't bear the thought of keeping my hands away from his sneaky face!"

"You must, though."

"Why?"

"Because I want my enemy all to myself!"

"Oh, you do?" queried Cadet Hope, glancing shrewdly at his chum. "Oh, well, there's some sense in that!"

There was no time to say more. It was time to go out for dinner formation.

Out on the north side of the barracks building the cadet battalion formed and marched down to cadet mess hall.

At the dinner-table the news of Dick's predicament flew swiftly from mouth to mouth until it was being talked over by the entire battalion.

Dinner over, there came twenty minutes of recreation time, during which the cadets strolled outdoors.

Hope's first move was to draw his own arm inside of

Danford's, thus proclaiming his entire belief in his chum's innocence.

Perhaps a score of the members of the first class waylaid Danford in order to shake hands with him—their silent testimony to their belief in him.

Yet the fact that so many held away hurt our hero keenly.

"Don't mind it, Juggins," whispered Swogger. "The fellows who keep in the background do it because they are suspending judgment. They don't really believe you guilty—don't want to."

Cadet Mason had vanished as soon as he came out from mess.

He was not seen again until our hero's section formed to march in to the next examination.

This was over at last, but there was barely time for the cadets to get back to barracks and into dress uniforms.

Once more they formed north of barracks, marching out onto the parade-ground.

Dress parade is the crowning glory of the day at West Point.

This ceremony, beautiful anywhere, is seen at its best when performed by the battalion of cadets, the finest body of soldiery in the world.

Dick Danford went through the required movements with a heavy, aching heart, though with soldierly precision.

Hundreds of visitors stood nearby, watching the inspiring sight, while the post band played.

But our hero, in his brief glimpse of the crowd, had seen but two of the throng of onlookers—Kate Tallant and her father.

And now the adjutant had taken his station, to read the orders of the day.

Order after order was read through, while the cadets stood motionless and in perfect alignment in their splendid battalion formation.

Then came another order from headquarters.

It recited the charge that had been made against Cadet Richard Danford.

Poor Juggins pricked up his ears, turned crimson, and trembled inside the natty gray uniform.

The order wound up with these words:

"Enough evidence has been secured to make it appear, reasonably, that Cadet Richard Danford is the victim of a plotter, another cadet, who, it is believed, prepared the said answers and placed them inside Cadet Danford's blouse. Cadet Danford is therefore exonerated upon this presumable evidence secured by the academic authorities. The cadet who is suspected of treachery against Cadet Danford is not positively proven to be guilty. There is not evidence enough against him to warrant the preferring of charges. Therefore, the suspected cadet is not named."

Not even the rigor of military discipline could keep back the flash of triumph and joy that shot into Dick's eyes.

He was released from all suspicion! Not fully exonerated, perhaps, but at least the incident was not to be allowed to keep him from earning his commission in the regular army!

He was not to miss service in the coming war with Spain!



Mason had failed—failed utterly and completely in his effort to ruin his enemy.

Moreover, in the very nature of things, Mason was now under suspicion, and would be closely watched in the future.

With a vastly lighter heart our cadet attended the hop that night.

Kate greeted him, on his first approach, with a cheery, friendly smile.

"Of course you could not be guilty of such a thing!" she cried, quickly. "No one who knows you could believe such an absurd thing, Mr. Danford. But wasn't it splendid of Colonel Graham to sift the whole matter so quickly?"

She gave him two of her dances.

But she danced the same number of times, also, with Mason!

## CHAPTER VII.

### MASON GETS HIMSELF AND HIS ENEMY IN TROUBLE.

Sunday morning inspection!

By nine o'clock every cadet was in his own room in cadet barracks, awaiting the visit of an army officer on a tour of inspection.

Every cadet was in dress uniform—his whole appearance absolutely faultless, spick and span.

Every room was in apple-pie order.

Not a speck of dust showed anywhere.

The bedding was piled up according to regulation.

Every article of wearing apparel was in its proper place and in perfect condition.

Even on the study tables, of which there were two in each room, the books and stationery were piled and arranged strictly according to military regulation.

It was the duty of the inspecting officer to see that every cadet and every room in barracks were in precise order.

Dick stood alone, with his back to the window.

Just at the stroke of nine Fred Hope sped back into the room from a visit to the cadets in another room.

"Close shave," smiled Dick.

"Oh, I had my eye on the time," Fred retorted.

Then they hushed, for out in the corridors could be heard the tread of the inspecting officers.

A hand rested on the knob of the door, followed by the entrance of Lieutenant Stapleton.

Both cadets instantly came to the position of attention, while the army officer swiftly noted the condition of the room.

Then he went to their kit-boxes, examined the clothing and equipments in their places, and, last of all, turned his attention to the cadets themselves.

"All in order here," remarked the lieutenant, briefly. Then, suddenly:

"Hold on! Mr. Danford, step past me!"

Dick obeyed.

"How came that stain on your trousers, Mr. Danford?" demanded the army officer, crisply.

"Stain on——" gasped Dick, unbelievably.

"On the back of the right leg of your trousers. Look for yourself!"

Poor Juggins turned, twisted his leg.

There, on the back of his trousers, between ankle and knee, was a hideous black stain, showing plainly on the gray cloth.

Some six inches in length, this black smooch was about two inches in width.

"Have you any explanation to offer, Mr. Danford, as to the untidy, unsoldierly appearance of your uniform?"

Lieutenant Stapleton's voice was as severe as if he had accused the young man of murder.

"None, sir," Dick admitted, shamefacedly. "I didn't know that the stain was there."

"You should have known, Mr. Danford."

Stapleton noted the incident in his note-book.

"Change your trousers before chapel call, Mr. Danford."

"Very good, sir."

The lieutenant was gone.

Dick was crestfallen.

The condition of his full-dress uniform meant that demerits would be entered against him.

Demerits affect a cadet's chances of graduation.

"Now, who could have done that mean thing?" blazed Fred Hope.

"Why, I remember, Swogger, that Mason——"

"Mason!" Cadet Hope almost exploded.

"He kicked against me in the corridor a little while ago. It seemed like an accident. He apologized, and——"

"And got you into a pretty mess!" uttered Cadet Hope, disgustedly. "Juggins, old boy, I've certainly got to find an excuse for fighting him."

"Don't, Swogger!"

"For the same reason, Juggins?"

"Yes; I want him all to myself."

"All right," sighed Cadet Hope, resignedly.

Danford soon had himself attired more suitably for the coming attendance at chapel.

"I'm going down now, Swogger."

"Can I go with you?"

"Certainly."

Arm-in-arm, the two chums descended the stairs.

They came out on a wooden, railed porch at the west end of the quadrangle inside of barracks.

It was a beautiful, perfect Spring Sunday morning.

Nature seemed wholly at peace with the world.

In that atmosphere of strict discipline all seemed as perfect as could be.

But Dick Danford's raging heart was wholly out of tune with the surroundings.

Had ever a cadet been as dirtily treated as Mason had treated him?

"If I meet him now——" Dick muttered, vengefully, to himself.

Then, suddenly, in a whisper:



"There he is now, Swogger!"

"The whelp!" returned Hope, with cheery spite.

"Step back!"

"Eh?"

"I want to face him alone."

"Make a good job of it, then!"

"Trust me!" Dick thrilled.

Hope vanished back inside the doorway, while Dick Danford strode straight up to his enemy.

Mason turned, saw who was coming.

"Oh, good morning, Danford!" was his cold greeting.

"This isn't the first time we've met to-day," Dick retorted, meaningly.

"Danford, your voice sounds as if you wanted to pick a quarrel?" quizzed Cadet Mason.

"Would you be astonished if I did?"

"For what reason?"

"Surely, Mason, you're not hypocrite enough to pretend that you don't know!" cried our hero, swelling with indignation.

"If you've got anything to say to me," sneered Mason, "it won't hurt you to be honest enough to come straight to the point."

"I will, then!" Danford blazed.

"I'm listening!"

"You tripped your foot against me in the hall this morning."

"Well?"—sharply.

"Your boot was smeared with ink, paint, or something. You soiled my trousers—got me in for a few demerits."

"Is that all?"

"Not by a long sight!" cried Dick, wrathily. "You prepared that list of answers in history, folded it inside my handkerchief and got it into my blouse pocket. Colonel Graham must have been satisfied that you did it."

"You told him so?" sneered Mason.

"I did not. But there were a few letters written on the other side of that sheet. He probably compared it with your writing and suspected you. Perhaps he discovered that you had been seen using a certain typewriter. A search of your study-table or kit-box may have revealed some of the same kind of paper on which the questions were written."

"Say," hinted Mason, jeeringly, "you ought to be a detective. You are better fitted for that than for being an army officer. But even as a detective you blundered. I'm glad, though, Danford, to know that you told all this to the superintendent."

"I didn't tell him," denied Dick, a dangerous light in his eyes. "I didn't tell him a word—refused him the name of the man I suspected."

"You lie!" challenged Mason, with swift heat.

"Repeat that, please," begged Dick.

"You lie!"

Cadet Danford leaped swiftly forward.

In a twinkling there was a clinch, a mix-up.

Two cadets were battling with all the intensity of deep hatred that had found an outlet.

A most unusual thing was happening this Sunday morning.

The Board of Visitors, now assembled at West Point, was taking a hand in the inspection.

Not so much that was unusual in that, but Kate Tallant and another young lady had actually secured permission to go through barracks with the Board.

They had just come down one of the numerous flights of stairs leading to this same porch.

Just in time, too, to witness the scene that was being enacted by two cadet enemies.

Neither Dick nor Mason was aware of the presence of the girls.

They fought on, desperately.

First, Kate and her friend stepped back.

But curiosity and interest soon drove them forward.

Dick had slightly the better of it when he heard Kate's low, shocked voice:

"A fight, on the Sabbath morning!"

He did not recognize the low voice, but knew it to be a woman's.

Our hero drew back, prepared to quit promptly for the time.

But Mason, who had not heard, was quick to seize the advantage offered by Danford.

Whirl! Slam! The advantage had been utterly changed in a second after Dick's confusion.

The angry cadet pushed him back over the railing.

He was so furious that he meant to hurl Dick down upon the pavement, and, perhaps, kill him.

The girls shrieked, and rushed toward the struggling boys, blanched with horror.

"Gentlemen! Mr. Mason! Mr. Danford!" begged Kate.

Then Mason heard, and Dick knew who the fair interceder was.

Like a flash Mason drew back and straightened up.

Dick regained erect position more slowly, for in that heavy, backward wrench his back had been strained.

Both cadets quickly removed their caps.

"Miss Tallant!" cried Mason, aghast. "Miss Emory!"

"We did not know—did not dream—that ladies were near!" Dick protested, confusedly.

"Is that the only explanation you have to offer?" Kate asked, rather sharply.

Then, instantly, her voice became as cold as the look in her eyes, as she added:

"It is fortunate that we appeared as we did. The Board of Visitors——"

She stopped abruptly, for, at this very moment, the Board appeared through a doorway, under the escort of the superintendent and his adjutant.

Even now all might have been well, but Captain Blake came hastening up across the quadrangle.

As tactical officer of the day, the captain had seen part of the affair from a window in the cadet guard house down the quadrangle.

"I'd be obliged for a word with you, sir," announced Blake, saluting the superintendent.



For a few moments the two officers conferred together in undertones.

Then Colonel Graham turned, walking over to where the two angry cadets stood.

"Mr. Danford! Mr. Mason! I learn that you have been fighting."

"Yes, sir," both cadets answered.

"Who was the aggressor?"

"I hit the first blow, sir," Dick answered, saluting.

"Why?"

"I felt that I had good reason, sir."

"What reason?"

Dick hesitated.

"Must I answer that, sir?"

Colonel Graham turned impatiently to the other cadet.

"Mr. Mason, what provocation did you give?"

"I passed the lie, sir."

The superintendent eyed both boys keenly, disapprovingly.

But he was, of course, aware of one reason for hostility between the pair.

Finally he said, briefly, coldly:

"I shall enter ten demerits against each of you. Go to your rooms at once."

"Under arrest, sir?" asked Dick, saluting, respectfully.

Colonel Graham hesitated.

"No," he said, finally. "For this time the demerits will be sufficient punishment."

Both cadets saluted, then turned and went up the stairs together.

Neither spoke as they passed to their rooms, for both knew that any further fighting, just now, would mean their dismissal, in disgrace, from the academy.

Dick had one more ugly jolt in store, however.

After chapel, and after dinner, he called at the house of the officer in whose family Kate and her father were guests.

He was told that Miss Tallant was "not in."

"Is that another black eye for me, I wonder?" he quivered, inwardly.

Half an hour later he came face to face with Cadet Mason and Kate Tallant, as that pair were just turning into the lovely lane known as Flirtation Walk.

Kate did not even favor our hero with a glance.

"How on earth did Mason ever manage that?" throbbed Juggins, flushing hot and cold.

He was utterly wretched now.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE LAST HOPE OF THE DASTARD.

Not everything was lost.

For graduation day found Dick Danford among those who had succeeded in passing—in graduating.

Demerits had dragged him lower down the line of the newly fledged army officers.

Yet, at least, he was securely in the army!

He was to be a second lieutenant of infantry.

Steadily the excitement and anger of the country had grown.

The dastardly sinking of the *Maine* was fast reaching the climax in relations between the United States and the Spaniards.

War was now as certain as death or taxes.

West Point men rejoiced accordingly.

For only one trade are soldiers trained—war.

War, therefore, means the opportunities that the young soldier covets.

"We're starting right in our profession," grimly said Fred Hope to his chum on graduation day.

"Meaning what, Swogger?" demanded Dick.

"Well, those of us who get through the war without the hard luck of being killed are likely to find rapid promotion awaiting us."

"Promotion at the expense of those who are killed," retorted Dick, his face clouding for the moment.

"Oh, well, that's a soldier's business—getting himself killed," laughed Swogger. "That's what the country pays us for, and expects of us."

"Yes, it's tough, after all," protested Dick Danford, "that those of us who live and get ahead in our profession of fighting must find our main chance at the bier of some comrade."

"Oh, say!" laughed Swogger. "You want to get transferred, Juggins, old boy."

"Transferred?"

"Yes; to the chaplain's corps. Then you can see the fighting, and yet have all the chance you want for preaching."

"I believe I'll stick to the line, and do my share of sword-carrying," smiled Dick, taking a tighter grip on the diploma he had but recently received in Cullom Hall.

They were sauntering slowly across the parade-ground, on their leisurely way back to barracks, where they were to sleep for the last night of their West Point life.

Thy still wore the fine old West Point gray, though their uniforms no longer proclaimed them as cadets.

They were "nothing" now—cadets no longer, not officers yet.

In the course of a day or two—a week at the latest, probably, President McKinley's commissions would reach them.

Then they would be second lieutenants in the army—then, but as yet "nothing."

"Four years of fearful grind through," mused Fred, as he looked fondly around him over the long-familiar scenes of the military academy. "And all for what? To be dead within four weeks, or four months, very likely!"

"Who's preaching now?" smiled Dick.

"Or showing cold feet?" demanded Hope, drily.

"No, no, Swogger! You'll never show cold feet. You're too much of a West Point man to ever run from an enemy."

"By the way, Juggins, I wonder what sort of a record



that crooked Mason is going to pile up? I wonder if he'll find some way out of going to Cuba? Some soft, easy, safe berth in this country while the scrap is being scrapped out?"

"I've almost ceased guessing about him," Dick flared. "He isn't worth it."

They reached the grim, gray old stone barracks at last.

They climbed the stairs slowly, thoughtfully, fondly.

It was a fearful ordeal—that four years of hard grind and strenuous soldier life at West Point, but after all they were wonderfully fond of the place that they were to leave on the morrow.

Entering the bare but friendly old room that had sheltered them for so long, both young men deposited their new diplomas in their kit-boxes.

"I'm going out, now," declared Hope. "Come along?"

"No; I've something to do here, Swogger."

Something very important, indeed!

After Swogger had gone, Dick Danford opened his kit-chest once more.

From somewhere near the bottom he drew out a letter, in an unsealed, addressed envelope.

Addressed to Kate Tallant, in fact.

Dick read the letter over twice.

It was not a long epistle, but brief and soldierly.

He had begged an appointment with Miss Tallant, for a brief word ere he left West Point.

Presently there came a knock at the door.

It was the coming of the soldier whom Dick had engaged to carry the letter for him.

"Take it now," said Dick, sealing the flap of the envelope.

Then he waited—waited for an hour before the soldier again knocked.

"I had to wait until Miss Tallant came in," reported the soldier.

He handed over her an envelope, bulkily filled, but addressed in Kate's own dear handwriting.

"Very good," Dick replied, handing his soldier-messenger some money.

Left by himself, the young West Pointer opened the envelope in feverish haste.

Then a low cry escaped him.

In his hand he held—his own letter. the seal still unbroken.

No other word—not a line!

"That's the finish!" Dick uttered, brokenly, though he tried to smile. "She won't even open my letters. Well, well! Other fellows have been up against the same luck before. But I shan't so much mind, now, if a Spanish bullet does find me! That may be Swogger's way of reaching promotion."

"What's that?" demanded Hope, himself, entering the room briskly at that moment.

"A habit I've developed of talking to myself," Dick answered, evasively.

Swogger looked curiously at his comrade.

"Oh! that's it, eh? A beastly bad habit, I call it, Juggins."

Under his breath Hope added to himself:

"Thank goodness I've made up my mind to be a bachelor officer until I'm a colonel!"

Never had there been a gayer ball at West Point than the one given that graduation night.

Dick was there, though looking listless enough.

He stood moping at the side of the room.

Every now and then he caught a glimpse of Kate Tallant, from a distance, and his heart ached.

Always, heretofore, she had come to cadet hops in a demure, girlish frock.

To-night she had blossomed out as a woman.

In her black hair glistened a crescent of diamonds, her only jewelry.

Her bodice, low cut, revealed a perfect, white, glistening neck.

Her splendidly molded arms, gloved, but not hidden, seemed borrowed from some perfect statue.

Her strong, rounded young figure caught many an eager eye that night.

Her fine eyes sparkled, her laugh rippled often.

She had given three dances to Mason, a fact that soon set tongues to wagging on the sly.

"If she were trying to punish me for some crime, she couldn't do it better," thought jealous, distracted Danford.

"Cheer up, old fellow, or folks will think you're worrying over the risk of meeting the Spaniards!"

It was Hope's light, laughing voice that sounded in his ear.

Swogger meant well enough, but he didn't know—or else didn't know enough.

To Dick Danford that whole brilliant scene, with its hundreds of cadets, its sprinkling of army officers, its civilian guests, and, above all, its scores of charming girls—that whole scene was but a nightmarish dream.

Once Dick turned to find Kate regarding him steadily.

He started as he fancied he read invitation in her eyes.

Quick to charge at a desperate hope, he turned, flushing hotly, then trembling with cold, and made his way toward her.

She turned her glance away slightly as she saw him coming.

But still he went forward.

Kate waited until he was almost close enough to speak.

Then, coldly and deliberately, she wheeled, turning her back fully upon him.

That slight was too apparent—the snub too studied to be misunderstood.

His heart sinking, Dick Danford passed the girl of his heart, kept on until he reached the door, and passed out into the night.

Mason's ugly eyes followed our departing hero.

"The chance is near now!" he thought. "We'll be in Cuba soon, you and I, Dick Danford! We're to be in the same regiment—the same battalion. There'll be a chance to get behind you, Danford. I shall have a pistol. I can



raise it and fire. No one, in the heat of battle, will ever be able to prove that I didn't fire at the enemy ahead of us both!"

## CHAPTER IX.

### BELOW SAN JUAN HILL.

"Reveille time, sir!"

Sergeant Johnson was shaking him by the shoulder.

Lieutenant Dick Danford awoke instantly in the gray of the Cuban morning.

He shivered as he sat up, for he had slept through the night without other shelter than his blanket gave him.

A mist that was much like a fine rain was falling.

As he looked around he saw other blue-clad figures crawling out of dog-tents, curious little canvas affairs just big enough to cover two soldiers each as the men lay upon the ground.

His regiment, the Thirty-first Infantry, was quickly astir.

"Firewood in the forest to the west. Water three hundred yards to the southeast."

This information the corporals and sergeants were repeating broadcast.

"So this is war?" murmured Dick, as he rose to his feet, drowsily, and stretched.

Yes, this was war! Back at West Point it had been all theory; here was the real, practical thing.

And every man in the regiment knew that to-day the little American army was to encounter the little, brown-skinned Spaniards who manned the defences between here and Santiago.

Dick looked down at himself and smiled as he remembered the old days of natty uniforms at West Point.

Now he was clad in a blue flannel army shirt, blue trousers, down the outer sides of which ran the broad white stripe denoting the infantry officer.

From just below his knees leggins of brown khaki ran to his shoes.

When he had done stretching, Dick buckled on his belt, from which hung his straight, narrow infantry sword at the left, while from the same belt, over his right hip, depended the holster that held his revolver.

On his head was an army sombrero, much the worse in looks for having been used as a nightcap.

On the ground were his haversack—a canvas pouch that contained food and other supplies—and a canteen holding water.

His whole personal outfit showed more than traces of the mud through which the regiment had marched the day before over the mountains.

Hardly had Dick looked twice when the little tents were all down, as if by magic.

All over the hill slope on which the regiment had encamped for the night soldiers were now busy building little fires on which to cook their breakfasts.

"Good morning, sir!" was Dick's greeting, as he strode over to where his company commander was making the same brief toilet that our hero had just finished.

"Good morning, Danford," nodded Captain Crane, after returning our hero's salute. "You slept well?"

"Like a log, sir. But it seemed odd, just now, not to be roused by a bugle-call."

"We're too close to the enemy to give any needless information with our bugles," said Captain Crane, pointing over toward San Juan Hill, visible in the distance.

Dick strolled through the company to see that all was going right, then returned to the spot where he had slept through the night.

Here his striker, Private Mullins, was preparing the young officer's breakfast.

"It's not what I'd give you in barracks, sir," grinned Mullins, looking up.

"Anything—even a baked baby—would taste good this morning," laughed Danford.

Over a fire of twigs Mullins had set cold water to boil in an agate cup. When it came to a boil he dropped in a handful of coffee. This boiled for a couple of minutes, after which Mullins took the cup from the fire, threw in a dash of cold water to settle the grounds.

"Coffee's ready, sir. Bacon in a minute."

Mullins was already frying the bacon strips over the fire as Dick Danford squatted on the ground, drank his coffee, without sugar or milk, and munched at a hardtack. A moment later he had the bacon to add to this fare.

But Dick ate heartily, as he looked off at the country around him.

Not all of his own regiment was visible from where he sat. Most of it was hidden among the trees. Of the many other American regiments within the few surrounding miles not one was visible.

"This seems more like a picnic than anything else," muttered the young officer.

"It'll be no picnic in an hour or two more, sir," returned Mullins, with a shake of his head.

Mullins was a veteran, who had served in many an Indian campaign.

"Mr. Danford!" called Captain Crane, as soon as he saw our hero putting down the last few mouthfuls.

Hastily Dick got up, strode over to his superior and saluted.

"Mr. Danford, see to it that all the men of this company have their rations cans washed at once. See to it that every man is ready to sling on his haversack, canteen and blanket roll at an instant's notice."

"Yes, sir," and Dick, saluting, strode away on the rounds of his men. The army being short of officers, there was no first lieutenant for H Company, so all this work fell upon our hero.

But, within ten minutes, he satisfied himself that everything under his charge was snug.

He walked over to the edge of the company's ground, standing in the shade of a great mango tree beside his captain.



"All ready for trouble, Danford?" hailed a voice.

Dick turned, recognizing Lieutenant Mason of G Company, of the same regiment.

"All snug," nodded Dick. He was neither surly nor especially agreeable. He and Mason were officers in the same regiment now, and belonged to the same officers' mess. It was necessary for the two young men, fast enemies though they were, to keep up an appearance of courtesy.

"Going to be a beastly hot day," grunted Mason, who had already saluted Captain Crane.

"All Cuban days are hot at this time of the year," Dick replied, briefly.

Mason then turned to talk with Captain Crane.

"Be careful how you handle that revolver, Mason," spoke Crane, rather sharply. "I don't want any of my men hit accidentally."

"I am just seeing that it is in apple-pie order to-day," replied Mason, lowering the muzzle of the weapon.

Dumping out the cartridges, he carefully examined the mechanism of the weapon, then put the cartridges back in the chambers.

"It's all in shape to get Danford with to-day," the sneak confided to himself.

Not once since leaving West Point had Mason given up the plan of shooting Dick from behind at the first opportunity in battle!

"Expect to use that thing much?" asked Dick, carelessly.

"If I get close enough to the enemy," returned Mason, with a significance that was lost on our hero.

"Take my word for it, Mason," grunted Captain Crane, "that you won't find much use for that pistol. In action, an officer has all he can do to keep his eyes on his men."

"There are three officers to our company, sir," Mason smiled, darkly.

"That won't give you any opportunity to shirk," retorted the old captain. "Three officers have all they ought to do just in managing a company."

"Isn't your pistol ready, sir?" asked Mason, opening his eyes wider.

"Mine's back at the rear, somewhere with my baggage," smiled Crane. "I wish I hadn't this sword, either. An officer, Mason, is a sort of foreman, so busy with his men that he hasn't any time for fighting on his own account."

"Fall in!" called the adjutant, riding out into view from behind the trees.

He kept rapidly on his way down the line of the regiment.

Crane and Dick leaped forward. The time had come. H Company must be in line within thirty seconds.

Like so many engines the soldiers had leaped inside of their equipment.

The company had formed. The first sergeant read the roll.

Then the men waited, most of them dully.

Then, from further along came the marching orders.

"Fours right!" rang Crane's voice. "Right forward, route step, march!"

H Company was off! Dick was marching into his first battle—that battle, in preparation for which four long years had been put in at West Point!

Crane was at the head of the company—our hero at the rear, to keep sharp watch against straggling.

Boom! That was the first, deep-chested note of a gun over on El Poso Hill, where the American artillery was posted—the first note of one of the most savage battles in history.

A Spanish cannon answered. The artillery engagement became general for a few minutes.

Yet over it all, and in between, there came a new and sharper sound—the rapid firing of rifle volleys.

It was like the explosions of many packs of fire-crackers going off at once.

"I'll be in all that soon!" thought Dick, with a little thrill.

As yet no bullets of the enemy sought out the Thirty-first.

Now the marching men came to a narrow trail, where they were forced to plod along in single file.

G Company was coming up close behind, with Captain Hill and Lieutenant Mason at the head.

Dick soon found himself trudging along over the trail with these two officers.

Hill, a kindly, middle-aged man, explained to the two boyish young officers his views of how the day's fighting would be done.

It was intensely hot as the men plunged along, often knee-thick in mud, over that narrow trail, bordered, on either side, by the thick jungle.

Pss-s-seu! A sharp, low, whistling sound passed close over their heads.

"Our first Spanish bullet," smiled Captain Hill.

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when there came a chorus of a dozen or more of the little steel-coated pests.

"We're getting into the enemy's zone of fire now," said Hill, coolly.

"Near the enemy yet, sir?" asked Dick.

"Not as close as we shall be!"

Zip! Chug!

Dick turned just in time to see Hill's first sergeant fall to the trail, blood spurting from his right breast.

"Two of you men move the sergeant off the trail," ordered Hill, quickly. "Brown, you stay with him. Filson, join again as quickly as you can."

The three officers hastened forward again, for to stand there would block the trail.

"Is he badly hurt, do you think, sir?" Dick asked.

"Fatally, I'm afraid," sighed Hill. "Poor Ebers—he's a bully good first sergeant!"

The bullets of the enemy still came their way, fitfully.

Dick looked to see if any of his men were faltering. Not they! Most of them soldiers of long service, they knew well that this was what they had come for.

Now a man close to the rear of Dick's H Company suddenly stopped, spun around and dropped.



The two men behind him hurriedly dragged the poor fellow off the trail into the jungle.

"Bad hit?" asked Dick, hurrying forward.

"Dead, sir—shot through the forehead," replied a corporal, as he turned and skipped back to his place in the line.

Presently, as they marched, another man of H Company fell, drilled through the left thigh.

Word came up the line of G Company that Hill had lost two more men.

"It seems kind of tough to have men shot in this fashion, like rats in a trap," throbbed Dick.

"There'll be lots of it before the day's over," Captain Hill responded, briefly. "Don't get nervous, lad."

"Nervous, sir?" Dick Danford repeated. "Not mine, sir. I'm from West Point."

Just then our hero caught a glimpse of Mason's face. Though that young officer kept steadily on, his face had turned a dull, lead color.

"If he funks to-day, he'll be the only coward from our class," Dick murmured to himself.

Just ahead of them a staff officer sat on his horse, just off the trail at a point where the jungle was not thick.

"Three hundred yards further on, captain," ordered the staff rider, "be prepared to deploy your men out to the right. You'll receive further orders there."

"Deploy?" thrilled Danford, inwardly. "That's where we start our fight against the Spaniards, then!"

There was a rapid quickening of the pace ahead. Dick, leaving his brother officers and going forward, moved at a steady jog-trot.

Just ahead they broke from cover. Here a shallow, narrow, swift-flowing creek was in their path.

A dense, hot pest of bullets swept this point. Three men of H Company dropped while in the water.

Two horses and a mule lay where they had fallen in the water, their blood pouring out in the water and dyeing it a dull red.

"Bloody Bend," this horrible, exposed place—the spot where many a good American was to go down this day.

Dick Danford, as he plunged through this creek, knew what it meant to have bullets kiss his cheek.

But he came out on the other side, unharmed, his men ahead now moving at a run.

Soon they were through the trees.

"Deploy swiftly to the right!" bellowed Crane's voice. "Mr. Danford, take the left flank!"

They were out in the open now, and Dick had his first glimpse of Kettle Hill in the near distance.

In trenches up on top of that hill Spanish infantrymen were pouring out a murderous rifle fire that swept the plain below.

Across that plain the Thirty-first moved at rapid step.

They were suffering, for men were dropping here and there, yet not a shot was fired back at the unseen enemy.

"Fearfully hot work this, Danford!" called the voice of Mason.

Dick turned for an instant. The men spread out in one

long, thin line brought the left flank of H Company close to the right flank of G Company.

Mason was at this end.

Three men on H's left dropping caused the line to waver for an instant.

"Steady there, men!" Dick called, warningly.

On up the hill the regiment moved at good pace, as other American regiments were doing on other parts of the field.

It was the zone of death, but these Americans did not falter.

"Halt! Kneel! Fire!"

The line came to an instant stop, the barking of good American rifles crashing out on the air.

Dick stood up behind his thin line of kneeling men.

"Aim low!" he shouted. "Just graze the top of the hill!"

"My chance!" shuddered Mason.

He fell back several paces, his revolver drawn. He took careful aim.

Crack! Crack!

Amid that fearful din of firing Mason sped two bullets at Lieutenant Dick Danford!

## CHAPTER X.

### FACING THE SLEET OF DEATH!

Dick Danford did not totter or fall.

In all that tempest of bullets he did not know that two American missiles had passed by close to his head.

"Confound my aim!" gritted Mason.

He raised his revolver again.

A tug at his arm brought the weapon down.

Mason turned, with a start.

He found himself staring into the face of Private Mullins.

Just now that face was the face of a fiend.

"Begging your pardon, sir!" bawled Mullins, hoarsely, over the din.

"What do you mean, my man?" snarled Lieutenant Mason.

"Begging your pardon, sir, your firing made me uneasy."

"What the deuce has my firing got to do with you?"

"I'm only afraid, sir, that you'll hit my officer."

"Your officer?"

"Lieutenant Danford, sir—begging your pardon, the finest young officer in the army!"

"Join your company, and mind your own business!" thundered Mason.

"Begging your pardon, sir, as a striker, I'm privileged to be at the rear of the company line."

"Get out of my way, then, you meddler."

"Begging your pardon, sir," persisted Mullins, "won't you be careful with that pistol?"

"Hold your tongue, man!"



Private Mullins saluted, respectfully enough, though the look in his face made Mason feel colder than ice.

"Cease firing! Rise! On the double-quick—forward!"

On, with a cheer, swept the regiment.

Mason could not attempt to fire against orders.

His face a deeper lead color than ever, he ran onward, his revolver ready in his right hand.

They were facing a very sleet of death now, in the murderous fire that swept down the hill.

Men were dropping all along the line. The regiment, short of officers as it was, lost three at the foot of Kettle Hill.

But the two latest men from West Point were still uninjured.

Mason was trembling. He felt sick at his stomach, his heart was pounding, though weakly. In a word, he was beginning to be afraid.

He turned to look over his shoulder, as if to see if the way were clear to leave his company and bolt.

As he turned, he felt even sicker, for there, just behind him, watching his every move, was Private Mullins.

Nor was any thundercloud ever blacker than the look on Mullins' face.

"Confound that rascal! What does he mean to do?—shoot me?" faltered Mason, inwardly.

He was instantly so afraid of Mullins that he forgot to be afraid of the Spaniards up yonder on the hilltop.

Again came the order to kneel and fire.

Dick stood up; Mason sank to one knee, wishing with all his heart that the Spaniards would run.

Then, urged by a feeling that he could not overcome, Mason turned enough to be able to glance backward.

There lay Mullins, not more than fifty yards behind, his rifle trained in front of him, ready for instant use, but not yet firing.

"That scoundrel means to 'get' me!" quivered the coward.

He could have complained to Dick, and Mullins would have been ordered into the ranks.

"But the scoundrel would tell Danford just why he hung behind me," realized the coward. "No; I'd better take no notice—but, curse it, I can't try a shot at Danford now. If I do I'll certainly go down myself! That rascally soldier has the look of a fiend on his face!"

Once more the order came to rise.

But the regiment did not get far.

The Spaniards were firing as if they had gone suddenly insane with the lust of battle.

Against that sleet of death the bravest soldiers in the world must move slowly, cautiously, if they were to have enough men to hold the hill after taking it.

"Lie down! Fire only when ordered!"

Along a stretch of several hundred yards lay the thin line of the Thirty-first.

Enlisted men were ordered and forced to lie down for their greater safety, though even while prostrate on the ground many of them were reached by the missiles of the enemy.

Dick was standing coolly now.

Just behind the prostrate line of his men he had found his nerve.

It was the good old West Point brand!

Nearly all the officers were standing behind their men, though a few, in spots more exposed to the enemy's fire, were kneeling.

"I can't stand this—simply can't!" quivered Mason, his face again of a lead color.

He threw himself on the ground, trying to screen himself behind the bulky body of a big sergeant who lay just ahead.

Captain Hill glanced at his prostrate youngest officer, then turned to First-lieutenant Potter.

"I'm afraid, Potter, this company is one officer short!"

"It looks that way," returned Potter, contemptuously. "But he may get his nerve back soon."

"Aim lower, my man," urged Dick, stepping up behind a soldier. "You are aiming so high that you must be shooting twenty feet above the Spanish trench."

He stood there, watching the soldier mend in his aim.

"Beg pardon, sir," grunted a sergeant, stepping up and touching him on the arm.

"Well?" Dick demanded, turning.

"Captain Crane——"

Dick wheeled, like a flash.

Down the line he saw his commander lying on the ground, two soldiers bending over him.

"Shot?" quivered Dick, leaping forward.

He was quickly at Crane's side.

One bullet-hole through the right lung, another deep in his neck, Crane seemed done for.

"Lad—you'll—have to—take the company."

"Oh, I'm sorry, sir, to see you fixed like this!"

"A soldier's—lot. Don't waste time—here. Get back to—the men, Danford."

"All right, sir," Dick replied, rising, with mist in his eyes. "I'll do my best to handle the company as you would do it, sir. And I shall hope mighty soon to see you on the mend."

Dick stepped swiftly, now, to the middle of H Company's line.

He was its sole officer from now on.

Turning slightly, he found Osborn, now ranking sergeant of the company, at his side.

"Keep your eye on me, sergeant."

"Yes, sir."

"If you see me drop, sergeant, don't waste any time with me. Take the company and get it forward."

The sergeant saluted.

"And now lie down, sergeant. Protect yourself all you can. There's no use in both being hit."

"I—I'd rather stand, sir."

"Lie down!"

Sergeant Osborn threw himself flat.

"Who commands this company?"

A staff officer, his horse a splendid mark for the enemy, had reined up for an instant.



"I do," Dick replied.

"When the order comes to go forward, lieutenant, we move at a charge. There will be no more halting this side of the enemy's works. Keep your men going, with fixed bayonets, and sweep them right into the enemy's trenches."

The staff officer was off at a gallop.

"Cease firing!" Dick ordered, and his bugler sounded the call.

"Fix bayonets!" he shouted.

The men near enough to hear understood what the order meant.

A mighty cheer went up.

All along down the line, now, men were clamping their bayonets to the muzzles of their pieces.

"It'll be murder to charge," quivered Mason. "Wonder who gave that insane order?"

The looked-for order came.

"Charge!"

With a cheer, that was half Indian war-whoop, the men of the Thirty-first rose and dashed forward.

As they came on, running nearly erect, and not firing, the Spaniards had their best opportunity of the day.

They made the most of it!

Never, for a second, did that mad Spanish rifle-fire falter.

It was the sleet of death that swept down on the devoted American troops.

Man after man dropped in every company along the line.

Over all the racket of firing the ear-splitting American yell sounded over miles of battle line, for now the charge was on in earnest, and was general.

On up the hill! Closer!

For the first time on this bloody, infernal forenoon Dick Danford caught a glimpse of the active enemy.

The Spaniards, in their uniforms of blue and white drilling, had risen in their trenches now, firing ceaselessly from rifles held at the hip.

In the last stretch now!

A moment of frenzied uncertainty—then the soldiers of Spain, afraid to wait for the clash with cold American steel, broke and fled from their trenches.

A cheer, faint because it was panting, burst from the lips of Uncle Sam's fighters as they leaped into the trenches.

These trenches were bloody enough, and littered.

Dead and wounded Spanish soldiers lay all about.

"Here! No bayonetting of the wounded!" rang Dick Danford's sharp, shocked voice as he struck up the gun of a man of H Company.

The tempers of the soldiers were at boiling heat.

Many of them wanted to despatch every living enemy in sight.

But that is not the way civilized warfare is waged.

The wounded must be treated humanely.

"Halt! Kneel! Fire at will!"

That order, from Lieutenant Danford, brought another cheer from his men.

The slope and plain beyond were crowded with fugitive Spaniards, rushing blindly toward Santiago.

Now the rifles rang out from the newly captured trenches. American bullets went speeding and zipping after the routed enemy.

Spaniards fell by scores ere the fugitives reached places of safety.

It was the chance of the American soldier to "pay back" for the losses of that bloody forenoon.

Dick stood watching—not the fleeing enemy so much as the fire of his own men.

"Don't get excited! Don't waste ammunition!" he shouted, striding down the company line. "If you can't shoot low enough to hit, don't fire!"

He called Osborn to him by a gesture.

"Sergeant," he shouted, in his subordinate's ear, through the din, "find out how the ammunition runs."

Osborn saluted and was off, like a flash.

"Hardly twenty rounds to a man, sir."

Danford reached over, pulling the bugler close.

"Sound 'cease firing.'"

As the order pealed out the men obeyed, reluctantly.

They had been grimly enjoying their first good chance of the day to avenge themselves upon the Spaniards.

But there was serious need for the order, none the less.

Should the Spaniards halt, face about and try to retake the hill from the Americans, scarcity of ammunition would leave the Americans in a bad way.

It is the duty of the company commander to see to it that his men do not run too short of cartridges.

And now the Spaniards had halted, behind a second line of trenches, within easy rifle range.

Adjutant Grissom rode down the line with orders from Colonel Moss.

"Danford, don't take the trouble to reply often to the fire. Don't use much ammunition unless you find the Spaniards trying to work back here."

The same orders went to the other company commanders.

But now Dick called his striker, Private Mullins, to him.

"Mullins, go back and see how Captain Crane is. If he is conscious and can understand, tell him that we are now in the enemy's trench. If he demands to know how many men we lost in the charge, you can tell him that our loss was three killed and six wounded. Hurry, and then report back here, unless Captain Crane has other orders for you."

Mullins stood still, hesitating.

"What on earth has got into you, man?" Danford demanded, impatiently. "Why don't you start?"

"Begging your pardon, sir——"

"Speak quickly, or make tracks! You heard my order!"

There was a worried look in Mullins's dark, scowling face. He opened his mouth as if to speak.

Then, changing his mind quickly, the soldier saluted, turned on his heel and ran away to find the captain.

"If that coward, Mason, tried to play any tricks on my officer, though——" quivered Private Mullins, as he ran down the slope on his errand.

The deeper scowl that came into his dark face expressed the meaning of the watchful private.



## CHAPTER XI.

## THE DISGRACE TO THE FLAG.

As he sat there on the back of the trench, his head and bust showing to the enemy's fire, Lieutenant Dick Danford did just what many another American soldier and officer was doing at that same moment.

He thought of his sweetheart!

Over all the din, that was punctuated by the groans of the dying, Dick conjured up before him that sweet face of the girl he loved.

"I shall never understand," he muttered, heart-sick, as Kate's face rose before him. "She liked me well enough for a while. It wasn't until Mason and I had trouble that she began to turn on me. After that, she seemed to give all her thought to him. Heavens! I wonder if they're engaged?"

The thought caused him a shudder such as the most deadly work of the Spaniards this day had not been able to cause.

"Well, what if they are?" he muttered, restlessly.

Yet, in the next instant, he realized what the engagement of Kate to Mason would mean.

"She would marry him and come to live in this regiment!" our hero groaned. "To see Kate every day, and know her to be the wife of Mason! I'd rather the Spaniards get me to-day!"

The thought gave him a new contempt for death.

He rose, standing erect.

Captain Crane's fieldglasses, which the captain's striker had handed him, Dick raised to his eyes to scan the distant Spanish trench.

The sun glinted on the front lenses. That flash of light made his position plain to several of the enemy's riflemen.

A tempest of bullets swept about Dick.

"Lie down!" he called, sharply, to a few of his men who rose to their knees to answer the fire that menaced their young commander.

"It's the sun on the lenses that draws the fire to me," Dick smiled. "Shoot on, you little brown men! If you get me, you're welcome! There are shots that hurt worse than anything you've got in your guns!"

"Captain Crane's dead, sir," reported a voice at his elbow.

It was Private Mullins, back from a hard run.

"Dead! Poor old chap!"

There was such a cloud of mist in Dick Danford's eyes that he could no longer see through the fieldglasses. He let them drop to his side.

"Begging your pardon, sir," protested Mullins, "ain't you exposing yourself too much, sir?"

"Do you think so, Mullins?" smiled Dick.

"It don't seem needful, sir, to stand up when your men ain't firing," Private Mullins urged, respectfully.

"Oh, well, then, I'll sit down again!" laughed Dick.

Mullins stepped just back of the trench, out of harm's immediate path, and lay down to think.

The adjutant had stopped again at Hill's G Company.

"The colonel's compliments, captain," reported the adjutant, "and, as you've three officers, he directs that you send Mr. Mason over to report to Mr. Danford as second in command of H Company."

"I'm afraid Mason will be of little use to young Danford," muttered Hill to himself. But he walked over to Mason and gave the order.

That young lieutenant had been lying flat on the ground, just behind the trench.

"I'll go over just as soon as the fire slackens, sir," Mason replied.

"What's that?" Hill demanded, sharply.

"It's a very hot fire now, sir."

"You go at once, sir!" hissed Hill, sharply. "Don't let the men get the notion that you're afraid."

"I'm not afraid, sir!"

"You're a clever actor, then!" ground out Captain Hill from between his teeth.

Mason rose, prepared to take a crouching run down the line.

But old Hill was upon him, hissing in his ear:

"Straighten up, you cub! Hold yourself up straight, and walk slowly down the line as if you hadn't a care in the world! Mason, what kind of an example do you think you are to the men?"

Mason shook inwardly, but he straightened up and walked slowly away, as ordered.

"Confound this murderous business!" he groaned. "I never looked for this sort of thing when I went to West Point! I supposed it would be a quiet garrison life somewhere, with parades and dances! Whew! These fire-eaters can have all they want of this! Me for a seat on a shady porch with Kate to talk to!"

Dick surveyed his unliked comrade with a good deal of bewilderment.

"What's this? Mason strolling down the line? Got over his blue funk, I hope. I couldn't believe that he'd have cold feet for very long."

The two enemies and rivals looked curiously at each other as they met.

"Do you bring orders?" Danford asked.

"No; I've come for them."

"Eh?"

"I'm ordered to report to you for duty with this company."

"Oh!" smiled Dick. "Well, duty is not very hard here just now. There's nothing to do but to keep low and wait for the Spaniards to stop shooting. We haven't ammunition enough to waste any. How do you feel, Mason?"

"Dog-tired," replied the coward, with a sigh.

He had already seated himself at the back of the trench, in order to expose himself much less to the bullets that still zipped about.

"Take a nap, then, if you can, Mason. Get back of the trench and lie down there near Mullins."



"Mullins?" repeated Mason, with a shudder.

He turned in the direction of Dick's nod, only to shiver again as he caught the black look of the striker lying on his handy rifle.

"I think I will try a nap, if you don't mind, Danford, but I'll take it here in the trench."

Dick nodded, then raised his fieldglasses again.

Mason, on the other hand, found a space between two soldiers on which he could stretch himself flat.

Here, behind the breastwork of the trench, Mason quickly got over his fear, for the reason that, at last, he was wholly safe. No bullet could reach him as long as he kept his head below the breastwork.

"This confounded Danford seems to have a charmed life!" groaned the coward, as he lay there, watching occasional bullets hit the dirt around our hero. "If one of these little steel pests could get him—or that fiend, Mullins!"

Afraid, while Mullins looked on and watched, to make any attempt to shoot his enemy in the back, Mason hit upon another scheme that was hardly less wicked.

Fumbling in his haversack, the coward drew forth a photograph and held it before his face.

From where he sat Dick's keen eyes caught a sight of Kate's pictured face.

"They must be engaged, then!" he quivered.

But he turned his face away—towards the enemy.

In an instant he became the rigid, strict soldier. His whole interest in life—in all the world—centered on handling his company in the best way.

A pack-train of mules came up, loaded down with more ammunition.

Danford rose, walking over to his subordinate.

"Mason, I wish you'd take two non-commissioned officers and see that the cartridges are quickly distributed."

"Can't a sergeant see to that?" demanded Mason.

Dick gasped in his amazement. This kind of a query to come, under fire, from a West Point man!

"Be good enough, Mr. Mason, to see that the ammunition is promptly and effectively distributed."

Mason rose with a growl.

He crouched low as he walked, directing the men under him in a feverish way, as if he could not too soon be through with this task which exposed him to the stiff Spanish fire that was passing over the trench-top.

As soon as the last box of cartridges had been passed out, Mason, without reporting, lay down again on his back in the bottom of the trench.

Dick grunted, and turned away from looking at so poor an officer and soldier.

So the time wore away.

Soldiers, fagged out, wished that the night would come, when there might be a let-up in the fighting—a chance to sleep a few hours!

But the Spaniards kept on firing, in steady fashion, as if they had a supply of cartridges that would never end.

For the most part, our men did not answer the fire, but remained doggedly quiet in their trenches.

Toward the middle of the afternoon, however, the fire became fiendishly hot.

It looked as if the little brown enemy were trying to make things particularly lively before attempting a charge.

"Return the enemy's fire carefully. Check any sign of a disposition on the part of the enemy to advance!"

That was the order that travelled down the line.

Dick Danford, sitting there in the sun, hour after hour, until he felt as if he had been baked, roused to action.

"Load magazines!" he bellowed down the line.

Then, to his bugler:

"When you see my right hand go up, sound the order to commence firing at will."

With that he walked down, behind the trench, until he came to where Mason still lay.

"Better get up now, Mason," he advised. "We're going to return the enemy's fire. I want you to watch our right flank, to see that the men do not fire too high or too rapidly."

Whish! A sheet of bullets swept over the trench-top just as Mason started to rise.

He sank back to safety, his face lead-colored and his lips shaking.

"I'm not going to stand anything like that!" he faltered.

"Get up, Mason!" urged the young company commander, in a low voice.

"I tell you I won't!"

"What's that?"

Dick stared, with unbelieving eyes, at his rival.

"I won't do it!" Mason retorted, stubbornly.

"Mason, as your superior officer, I order you to go over to the right wing and watch the work of the men!"

"I tell you I won't until this fire slackens."

"Get up!"

"I won't!"

"You're not afraid of bullets, are you?" Dick demanded, aghast.

He himself was sitting on the back of the trench, his head and much of his body exposed to the sheets of bullets that were flying about.

Mason looked up at his enemy, marvelling at the courage Danford displayed.

"Get up!"

"No, sir."

The men nearby were gazing curiously, if slyly, at their two young officers.

They could not hear what was being said, but they could guess.

Down on his knees in the trench went Dick.

"Mason, for the love of heaven—for your pride in West Point—don't show the white feather now!"

"I ain't afraid."

"Then take your post—do your duty!"

"Not under this fire. It would be suicide."

"You coward!"

The words broke from Danford's lips in a sudden gale of anger and scorn.



"I'll make you sorry for those words!" hissed Mason, hotly.

"You can't. You're not a man—nothing but a cur—a whelp—a cowardly cur!"

Quivering with rage—far too angry to trust himself with more words, Dick rose and tramped back along the fire-swept line.

As he went he caught the amused, contemptuous gleam in Private Mullins' eyes.

"Every man in the regiment will know that Mason is a cold-foot before night!" groaned Dick. "To think that such a thing should come out of brave old West Point! He must be the only one of his kind, though!"

Down the American line a furious firing had started in reply to the Spanish assault.

Dick raised his hand for the bugler.

With a low-voiced "hurrah!" the men of H Company began to pump their magazines empty.

"This company has but one officer! I'll have to do duty for both!" raged humiliated Dick Danford. "Keep your head lower, there, my man! And you—you're shooting at the sky. Aim low!"

He saw a crouching soldier just before him fall backward, drilled through the brain by a Spanish bullet.

"Poor fellow!" muttered Dick. Then he bent over another soldier.

"Don't fire so fast, my man. Take some aim."

As Dick straightened up, he felt two quick, sharp stings—one in the breast, below the shoulder, the other in his hip.

But that was all he knew of it.

He toppled over, unconscious but half-sitting at the back of the trench.

Swifter than thought, Mullins had started for him. He dragged his young officer gently back to a place of safety from the sleet fire.

A minute later Lieutenant Mason opened his eyes as he felt the grip of one of Mullins' hands on his shoulder.

The Irish soldier's eyes gleamed with unspeakable hate, though his voice choked as he announced:

"You'll have to take the company, lieutenant, sir. Lieutenant Danford has just been killed!"

## CHAPTER XII.

### CONCLUSION.

Night had come down over the field before Santiago.

The American forces still lay in the first line of trenches captured that day.

Men who thought they had taken San Juan Hill, knew now that it was Kettle Hill instead.

But it mattered little. Nothing mattered much now.

The army was clean fagged out.

As many as could were resting flat on their backs.

Here and there parties of hospital corps men prowled for the wounded.

Other parties of soldiers, provided with picks and shovels, searched for the dead.

"Here's another body—oh, it's an officer!" announced a corporal at the head of a burial party.

Up out of the darkness rose Mullins.

"You can't have him!" he cried, hoarsely. "He's my officer. He ain't dead yet!"

"Dead as he ever will me," retorted the corporal, after looking closely at what was left of Dick.

"You can't have him, I tell you!" cried Mullins, fiercely, and swore.

"Oh, well, please yourself," growled the corporal. "There's enough dead men around here without friends."

Mullins sat patiently by the body of his young officer until a hospital party came within hail.

"Here's an officer that needs your care!" called Mullins.

Since dark had fallen he had lifted and carried Danford a quarter of a mile back from the trench.

"Are you a surgeon?" the Irish soldier demanded, eagerly, as one man from the hospital party approached.

"Yes."

"Thank heaven!" quivered the Irishman. "See what you can do for the poor officer, lad."

"Nothing," replied the surgeon, after a good look. He's dead. Who is he?"

"Lieutenant Danford, Thirty-first. But what's that you say, doctor? Sure, Lieutenant Danford's not dead, as any man can see."

"I say he is."

"And I say he's not!" retorted Mullins, fiercely.

"My man, you are forgetting yourself!"

"Begging your pardon, doctor, I'm beside myself, I guess," Mullins admitted, huskily. "But I've got to find a doctor who knows my young officer lad ain't dead."

"I'll send a burial party this way," said the army surgeon, as he moved onward.

"You will, will you?" glared Mullins after the doctor.

"Not if Mullins' back holds out this night! Lieutenant Danford, I'll carry you all the miles back to field hospital this night!"

Private Mullins was a man who prided himself on being as good as his word.

Hence it was that, ten days later, Lieutenant Dick Danford awoke to some realization of things.

As he opened his eyes he found himself looking upward at the snowy white canvas of one of the hospital tents back at the town of Siboney.

He did not wonder much at first, but lay there, thinking only slowly and dully.

Yet, by degrees, it all came back to him.

"Guess I got my wish, and took the Spanish cure for life!" he reflected, restlessly trying to turn.

His movement, slight as it was, brought a uniformed nurse to his side.

The first thing Dick noted was the red cross on her left sleeve.

"You're roused at last, Mr. Danford?"



His glance travelled from the sleeve up to her face.

"Kate?" he whispered, faintly.

"I'm called simply nurse here," replied the young woman, as she placed a cool hand on his fevered brow.

"Kate—how—did you—come—to be—here?" Dick asked faintly.

"Why, I came here on the first ship after the battle, with the first big lot of nurses," she replied, in a low, cheery voice. "You've been a hard patient, Mr. Danford. We thought, for days, you were headed for heaven."

"It's heaven here—now," Dick faltered.

"There! You mustn't try to talk now," ordered Nurse Kate Tallant.

"Yes, I must. I'll die if I don't," thrilled Danford, in his weak voice. "You must tell me a good many things—Kate."

"Well, then," she cried, holding a paper before his eyes, "here's the first good news to talk about. It's a telegram from the War Department. The President has signed your commission as captain!"

Dick eyed her in wonder.

"What for?" he gasped, faintly.

"For distinguished bravery in the field."

"But I didn't do anything—in particular," protested the young captain.

"Don't contradict your superior officers!" warned Kate, with pretended severity. "Your colonel recommended you for promotion, and the brigade commander, who saw your conduct, backed the recommendation. You don't think promotion is given for nothing, do you?"

"It doesn't count for much," sighed Dick, "unless the other good things go with it."

"What good things?"

"Kate, why—did you—turn the cold—shoulder on me—at the Point?"

Kate's face clouded swiftly. She colored deeply.

"Tell me the truth, Kate. Did—Mason—lie about me?"

"Yes," the girl admitted, dropping her eyes and her breast heaving.

"What—did he—say?"

"He told me," Kate replied, quiveringly, "that you had been saying things about me that did not sound well about any girl. I believed him, for I had been taught to believe that a West Point cadet couldn't lie."

"You—don't believe him, now—Kate?"

"No; not since the day of the battle. He was sent in that evening under censure for cowardice in the face of the enemy. Then I understood, for I knew that a coward could be a liar, too. Oh, Dick—Mr. Danford——"

"Kate," breathed Captain Dick Danford, slowly, though his face flushed, "I don't know whether I'm to get up on my feet again, to make any use of that captain's commission."

"Why, of course you are!" she cried, in her sweet, low voice. "If you weren't declared out of danger do you think I'd talk as much as this with you?"

"Of course, for mother's sake, I ought to hope to get up again and be on the active list."

"And don't you care for other reasons?" she asked, rather wistfully.

"That depends."

"Upon what, Captain Danford?"

"Well, upon whether life is really going to be worth the living."

"Captain, didn't you go through West Point with the sole and absorbing ambition of becoming an officer in the regular army?"

"Why, yes; of course."

"And now you're a captain, when hardly three months away from the academy!"

"But there are other things that one wants."

"Such as what?"

"Kate, ever since I've known you, I've wanted you!"

"That's not much of an ambition," laughed the girl, softly.

"It's a great one with me."

"Why, if I were a man, I wouldn't be silly enough to tie myself up to any girl for life," Kate declared, seriously.

"Kate, you're not a man, and your notion of what you'd do, if you were, has really nothing to do with the case."

"There is some of the authority of the officer getting into your voice now, Captain Danford."

"Do you like that tone?"

"Yes," she answered, "for it's natural; and I like you to become your old self as quickly as possible."

"How much do you like that old self of mine?" he asked, eagerly.

"Well enough," she evaded.

"Kate! You haven't yet answered my main question!"

"Which one?"

"About becoming Mrs. Danford."

"Gracious! Who's going to be?"

"Kate, don't torment me. It isn't fair. Are you, or are you not, going to be my wife when I'm up on my feet again?"

"I don't know," she replied, softly. "How should I know? You haven't asked me yet to become your wife."

"I haven't?"

"Not a word to that effect, captain!"

"Kate, please bend down over me close. There, that's it, dear. Now, then, Kate, I love you, and I can't do without you. The captain's commission will be very little good to me unless you are to share in my pride in it. Will you be my wife, dear, and share in the joy of the captaincy with me?"

Kate's gaze fell on her hands, which trembled. Her bosom throbbed; a tear showed in either eye.

"Will you, Kate?" pleaded the lover.

"Hospital nurse to headquarters tent!" rang the call down the long row of tents.

"That's for me. It's my turn to answer!" Kate Tallant cried, as she rose, in haste.

"But your answer can't wait, Kate," pleaded the wounded young officer.

"Oh, yes, it will," the nurse replied, as she patted his hand, then added:



"Lie still and keep easy until I can get back, Dick, dear!"

So things turned out so much all right that Captain Dick Danford, well and ready again for active service, became Kate Tallant's husband in the following October.

November of that year found them on a United States transport, on their way to the Philippines.

There Captain Dick Danford, after a few weeks of comparative idleness, then found himself in the thick of service against Aguinaldo's insurgent Filipinos.

As long as the fighting lasted, Captain Dick seemed to be always in the brunt of it.

But it was good, hard, splendid training for the making of a young soldier.

Though still only a captain, Danford found himself becoming one of the best-known and most popular officers in the army.

Readers of newspapers will remember having seen the name often in print in connection with brave or capable deeds.

There's a little Dick, now, and another Kate.

Fred Hope has become a captain, too, at last.

But Danford still keeps ahead of his old roommate, and of most of his old classmates at West Point.

Last fall, upon his return to the United States, Captain Danford was commissioned as a major.

He will have a few years more to go, and then he will be a colonel.

If a war should break out suddenly, as good an officer as Major Danford is almost certain speedily to become a general.

Major Danford and Captain Hope met, the other night, at the Army and Navy Club in New York.

"I've been getting rusty down on Governor's Island," grumbled Hope. "The worst of it all is that there doesn't seem to be a chance of anything doing in these days. All a soldier can do is to rust out."

"Or else prepare himself for the next war," hinted Dick, slyly.

"What chance does there seem to be of that?" asked Hope, dully.

"What chance did there seem to be when we first entered West Point?" retorted Dick. "And, speaking of the dear old academy, I got a paper to-day that interests me."

From one of his pockets Danford drew one of the long, official envelopes of the War Department.

"What is it?" asked Hope, as our hero passed the enclosure to him.

"Read it," begged the major.

"Great Scott! Ordered to West Point as senior instructor in infantry tactics! Whew!"

"Kate is very happy over the chance to go back to the Point to live," Dick smiled, proudly.

"I should think she would be!" ejaculated Captain Fred Hope. "Whew! I wish such luck would come to me!"

"There's Captain Hope over there," they heard a waiter saying.

Then a soldier in uniform, an orderly, came across the room, saluting both officers, then standing at attention.

"Well, what is it, Keasbey?" Hope inquired.

"Special orders for you, sir, came through from Washington to-night. The adjutant said I'd better bring this over to you, sir."

Fred seized the envelope, drawing out the official paper inside.

"Hm! Ordered to West Point as assistant instructor in infantry tactics," read Hope, without the quiver of an eyelash. "Very good, Keasbey. Thank you. You may go."

Saluting, the soldier turned and made his way out of the club.

"What was that?" cried Dick, eagerly. "You to the military academy, too, Fred? And as my assistant? Oh, this will seem like old days!"

"But we shan't share quarters there this time," sighed Fred. "Me for bachelor officer's quarters. That will be the lonely part of it."

"Tell you what you must do, Fred."

"What?"

"Find a nice girl, like Kate. Persuade her that the army life is the only kind for a woman."

"Oh, it's easy enough to persuade some women to try the army life," Captain Hope admitted, "but there's one much greater trouble."

"And what's that?"

"Why, finding a girl just like Kate Danford."

"Yes, that is hard," Major Danford admitted, a proud light shining in his eyes. "But do your best, anyway, Fred; get the best you can."

"I'll think that over," nodded Fred, with a smile.

THE END.

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